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PLATO

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PLATO

by

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PLATO

Chapter I

LIFE AND WORK[1]

Early Years

PLATO, the Athenian, the son of Ariston and Perictione or Potone, was born in 428 B.C., the fourth year of what Athens' great historian, Thucydides, writing as contemporary of the events, expressly denotes as the Great War. His birth followed close upon the death of Pericles, Athens' greatest statesman, who had perfected her democracy as well as her empire, which was being contested in this war by Sparta and her confederates, and who had enjoyed under that democracy a personal ascendancy comparable with that of the present American president. Plato's family, which on the father's side traced its legendary descent back to King Codrus and even to the god Poseidon, could on the mother's side show historical connection with Solon, the revered founder

[1] For the psychological descriptions contained in this chapter I have drawn on Plato's letters and Plutarch's *Dion* and *Timoleon*.

of the Athenian democracy. Besides high birth, respected at Athens as in all democratic states, especially when so closely bound up with democratic traditions as it was in this case, Plato had all the other things that were proverbially enumerated as blessings amongst the Greeks. He possessed wealth, health, and strength (he is said to have competed in wrestling at the Isthmian games), probably beauty (he had at any rate an extreme sensitiveness to the beauty of the human, especially of the male, body), and certainly genius. The sphere for this genius promised at first to be drama and poetry, which, it is abundantly obvious, he always felt as a tempting mistress and as a rival to his legitimate spouse, philosophy. With the latter he came early in touch under the form of the Heraclitean doctrine of universal flux which, as we can see from his writings, became in his mind associated with the teaching of the Sophist Protagoras about the relativity of knowledge as well as with that shared by other Sophists about the relativity of morals. From the age of eighteen, when the period of military service began, to the end of the war, his education must have been continued in the hard school of war. It was about the same time also that the influence on him of Socrates, his elderly friend, as he calls him, began to bear fruit. Uniting with the political tradition of his family, this influence tended probably not so much to turn him to speculation as to foster in him the desire to realize the absolute good in practice through the ideal of

scientific government which would demonstrate the Socratic doctrine of the oneness of virtue and knowledge. At any rate his youthful ambition, he tells us, was to turn to politics as soon as he became master of his own destiny.

Soon that ambition was given its opportunity, though a tragic one. The year 404 saw the end of the Great War with the collapse of Athens, of her empire, and of her democracy, which was blamed for everything, and was succeeded by what in the language of our own day, as used non-technically, we might call a fascist revolution, and what the Athenians referred to as the government of the Thirty. Amongst these Thirty was his mother's uncle Critias, while her brother Charmides was one of their prominent supporters. Naturally Plato received an invitation to take a hand in public affairs. With the optimism and naïveté of twenty-four, like many a young revolutionary of our own day, he took the new government at its word and looked to it for the moral regeneration of his country. Alas ! soon its proceedings made the previous régime " seem pure gold." The finishing stroke to Plato's hopes was dealt when his friend Socrates, whom he does not hesitate to call the most honest man of the age, and who had already made himself unpopular with the democracy through that very honesty, was ordered by the Thirty to arrest for execution Leon, an honest citizen of Salamis, in order that his name might be associated with their criminal acts. This order, like

the other one bidding him refrain from his philosophic activities amongst the youth, was, of course, disobeyed by Socrates. But it placed him in peril of death, and it was enough to open Plato's eyes and make him withdraw " in disgust " from the prospect of participation in political affairs. After a year and a half of a reign of terror and civil war the tyranny was put down and democracy restored in 403.

The Death of Socrates

The restoration was marked on the whole by moderation and absence of vindictiveness, a special act of amnesty being passed which forbade all political recrimination. Consequently Plato's thoughts began once more to turn to politics, though this time more slowly and cautiously. But once more Socrates was destined to act as the touchstone of a government's morality. In 399 he was brought to trial on the charge of " not believing in the gods in whom the city believes, and of introducing novel divinities, also of corrupting the youth." The " gods," which he, the most deeply religious man of classical antiquity, was really suspected of not believing in were the dogmas of democracy, while the " novel divinities " his accusers had in mind were the novelties of fascism, and that, too, notwithstanding the fact that under fascism he had risked death for " corrupting " the youth in what was thought an anti-fascist direc-

tion. It was the necessity of obeying the letter of the act of amnesty forbidding political recrimination that made it necessary to formulate the indictment in strange theological and ethical, rather than political, terminology. Yet the terminology reflected correctly enough the real feeling against him. He was put to death for refusing to offer to the idol of democracy the pinch of incense which might have saved him at the eleventh hour, and for preferring to proclaim instead his allegiance to the "novel" divinity of Truth.

After reading Plato's *Apology*, the *Crito*, and, above all, the *Phaedo*, we feel it no exaggeration to say that the execution of Socrates was as significant to Plato and the other followers of Socrates as the crucifixion of Jesus was to his disciples. Indeed it was more significant, for the followers of Socrates were thinkers, for whom their master's death constituted a crisis in their thought and a confirmation of what he stood for, while the disciples of Jesus were not thinkers at all, but uncomprehending though devoted folk, whom their beloved leader's death seems to have filled at first with nothing but fear, perplexity, and despair. The immediate effect of Socrates' death on Plato was to make him look with a critical eye not merely on the political life of his own city, to which, in the absence of any party he could join, he saw no way of contributing, but also on the existing laws, customs, and constitution of *all* cities. These were all diseased, he concluded. There was,

however, one cure, though only one, and it was also the cure for the lives of individuals. This was true philosophy. If mankind was to be saved, true philosophy and political power must come together either by philosophers becoming rulers or by rulers becoming philosophers. The union of the two is possible, he insists repeatedly. But, looking at things as they were with the eyes of the realist which he henceforth was to the end of his life in spite of his idealism, he repeats also each time that it is to be brought about by a miracle (good fortune from heaven). This was a thought that never left him, and it must never leave us in reading him or about him ; for only if we bear in mind all the time along with him *both* sides of the double requirement, the miracle as well as the philosophy, a thing which is rarely done by his modern interpreters, shall we do justice to the especial quality of Plato's thought, its mystical side, as well as to the influence upon it of Socrates, a religious influence.

But until the miracle came what was he to do ? He waited and watched. He did not give up hope. Nevertheless, Socrates' death did for him what his life had not done either for him or for any one else. It gave him the idea of the philosopher as the withdrawn spectator of life and of philosophy as a *flight* from life. The life in question is, it is true, that of cheating and huckstering, of the lawcourts and the market-place, of council rooms and committee rooms, of lobbying and voting, of caucuses and political

dinner parties, of the nursing or ruining of reputations, of minding your neighbour's business, of tuft-hunting and worshipping power and money and pedigrees.[1] But it filled him with a disgust and contempt, confirmed in him by the tragedy of Socrates, which Socrates himself could never have felt, and which made him sometimes express a longing for escape unsurpassed in its intensity by that of any medieval monk or anchorite or nineteenth-century romantic. The philosopher, he felt, would, indeed, look out for the miracle that would bring him the fitting theatre for his activities, but meanwhile, in this shoddy, vulgar, and brutal world, he would live like a man fallen among wild beasts; he would live quietly and mind his own business; he would take shelter from the storm of dust, hail, and wind, and, seeing the rest defiling themselves with lawlessness, he would be content to keep himself pure for this life and safe for the next.[2]

Plato's own escape took the form partly of writing, partly of travelling.

Borrowing and putting to a new use the literary form of his favourite author Sophron, the Sicilian writer of mimes (realistic one-scene prose dramatic sketches), and satisfying both his early love for drama and his interest in philosophy, he composed at this time the earliest of his dialogues, the *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Euthydemus*, *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Meno*, probably also the *Symposium*

[1] *Theaet.*, 172*d*–175*c*. [2] *Rep.*, 496*c*–*e*.

and *Phaedo*. In his own words, "they belong to Socrates made young and beautiful." [1] With unsurpassed graphic power, delicacy, and economy they resuscitate and mostly also rejuvenate Socrates, and set him moving upon his contemporary stage. Their drama consists in the clash and crash, the triumph or fall, of ideas as they emerge in the novel task of elaborating definitions. The emotions of which they exhibit the play are the perplexity and annoyance, the self-dissatisfaction and mortification, the fear and unease, as well as the hope and adventurous stir, roused by the breaking down of accepted comfortable conventions in the search for the absolute good. In short, they perpetuate for the theatre of all time, so as to propagate it amongst all generations of youth, that "corruption of the youth" for which Socrates was feared by contemporary fascists and democrats alike, and for which he was in the end put to death. They were indeed a truly noble and ingenious way both of mourning and avenging that death.

First Visit to Sicily : Prospect of the Miracle

Among Plato's travels the one fraught with the greatest consequences was his visit to the Greek colonies in Sicily and Italy, which in power, splendour, and culture were at that time rivalling the mother country. The first and deepest impression,

[1] *Epistle II.*, 314*c*.

however, which this Western civilization made on him was its corruption through the vices of gluttony, drunkenness, and sex immorality. It deepened, if it did not originate, his conviction of the power of the body to mar or impede the life of the spirit, a conviction which is ubiquitous in his writings, and which generally makes him speak of the body as the seat or instrument of evil, and invests his philosophy with an "asceticism" unsurpassed by medieval Christianity and contrasting, though also intimately connected with, his own and the general Greek appreciation of the beauty of the body and the life of the senses. It enforced upon him the further lesson which is also prevalent throughout his writings, and which confers upon his political speculation its sanity and concreteness, the lesson that the quality of the life of a community is simply the quality of the life of the individual writ large, and that, unless the individual quality is sound and disciplined in all details, including the commonplace ones of eating, drinking, and sex, there can be no sound or stable political system, but only a ceaseless changing between dictatorship, oligarchy, and democracy.

At the same time he made one encounter which must have stirred into activity once more his hope in the miracle. This was the meeting with Archytas. In the sixth century B.C. Pythagoras had founded some philosophico-religious brotherhoods which for a time acquired political power in several of the Greek cities in Southern Italy, so that for a while it had

looked as though inspired government might establish itself in this corner of the world. In the end, however, the mass inertia of human nature had reasserted itself and Pythagoreanism had been violently and brutally swept out of Italy. Now, however, it was being revived by Archytas, a most remarkable man. Besides being a philosopher, an eminent and original mathematician and inventor (amongst other things, of a child's rattle and a flying mechanical pigeon !), he was also an invincible general and a statesman who enjoyed in democratic Tarentum an ascendancy such as had been exercised by Pericles at Athens. In his person the miracle of inspired government was already being worked out. It wanted but a larger stage, and this stage was soon to be revealed.

From Italy Plato crossed over to Sicily. In this visit, writing as an old man thirty-six years after the event, he was definitely inclined to see the special intervention of Providence designed to change the whole course of Sicilian history. For through it he met Dion, and Dion was destined from the very commencement of their association to become the partner, and indeed the originator, of the active quest of the miracle. Born and bred in the shoddy, vulgar, and brutal world, for an escape from which Plato was looking to philosophy, and which in this case was aggravated by occidental luxury and by subjection to despotic rule, he had an intelligence and soul far above his environment. He had, in fact,

precisely the intelligence and soul which, according to Plato, were the indispensable qualifications of the philosopher. It is not surprising, therefore, that he was at once fired by Plato's principles and ideas of the higher life. Moreover, with the innocence and enthusiasm of twenty, he thought that everybody would be fired by Plato in the same way. Since absolute rule and absolute philosophy had not yet been brought together in one man to the extent to which Plato thought they needed to be, a beginning should and could be made in that way, he felt, by bringing together at least the absolute ruler and the absolute philosopher. He himself would bring them together. He did.

The absolute ruler was his own brother-in-law Dionysius. Profiting from the struggle which the Greeks had to carry on against the Carthaginians, and which made unity and absolute authority indispensable, Dionysius had made himself dictator of Syracuse and from there, after building up a large army and fleet, he had established, by means partly of war, partly of clever and unscrupulous diplomacy, a despotic empire over the Greek cities in Sicily, and he was now in the process of successfully extending it over most of those in South Italy. Dynamic and gifted, a lover withal of the arts and an aspirant after fame as a dramatist, he lacked, Plato thought, the one quality indispensable to every successful ruler and empire-builder—the ability to trust and make others trustworthy. Both of them middle-aged, the

philosopher and the dictator faced each other over the head of their youthful go-between, the former discoursing on absolute virtue, absolute courage (which he did not identify with the spirit animating a dictator), absolute morality and its connection with absolute happiness, the other challenged, suspicious and jealous of a power so different from his own. "What have you come for?" he asked angrily. "To look for a good man," replied Plato. "And obviously you haven't found him yet," came the instant retort, meant not so much as a statement of fact, but as a rebuke and dismissal. The meeting was decidedly not a success. Its only results were to provide Plato with the material for his classical picture of the dictator in the *Republic* as the terroristic slave of fear, and to decide him once for all to abandon the active for the contemplative life. If we may believe the traditional story that, through a hint given by Dionysius to the captain of the ship conveying Plato home, he was sold into slavery, it had the further result of reducing him to the lowest condition of life, from which he was saved only through the timely offer of ransom by a friend.

The Academy

Back in Athens in the year 388, with his choice of life firmly determined by experience, he founded the Academy, in a gymnasium so called after a local

tutelary spirit. It was the first European university. The subjects taught or researched upon in it were those which according to Plato constituted real knowledge, namely, philosophy and mathematics (including astronomy). About the philosophy we shall hear later. How important were the mathematical studies pursued in it we can realize if we consider that the following were all of them first worked out by people associated with the Academy : solid geometry and conic sections, the method of exhaustion, and the theories of incommensurables, proportion, concentric celestial spheres, the axial revolution of the earth and the revolution of Venus and Mercury round the sun. Nor were more human subjects neglected. For, true to the original Socratic inspiration leading him to seek a combination of science and government, Plato made the science of government one of the chief subjects of the Academy, which later began to send out counsellors and law-givers alike to kings, dictators, and democracies. Yet in spite of this interest in practical things the Academy was a refuge from the shoddy, vulgar, and brutal world, a refuge which Plato was not allowed to enjoy without interruption. After twenty years of strenuous teaching, during which he composed also some of the most important of his dialogues, the *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Theaetetus*, and *Parmenides*, in 367 B.C. he received once more and in unmistakable guise the call to the quest of the miracle.

Second Visit to Sicily : An Essay in Miracle

In that year Dionysius died, and was succeeded by his son Dionysius II. Dion, now a man of forty, had remained throughout faithful to the hope and vision with which he had been inspired at his first meeting with Plato. In the court of Dionysius I., thanks to his sheer ability, necessary to the despot, he had enjoyed a unique position, being allowed even the privilege of free speech. Now, helped in addition by his princely wealth, he towered easily as a giant amongst the boon companions and slavish toadies who surrounded the young and inexperienced ruler, and, in spite of the unpopularity earned him by his mode of life so different from theirs, in spite also of their constant attempts to undermine his influence, he had the affairs of the empire practically in his hands. These affairs he now saw going to pieces through the loose living of the young tyrant which was also loosening the iron bonds of authority forged by the old one. A disinterested idealist with no desire and no possibility of seizing power for himself, what was he to do ? An inspiration struck him. The chief fault of Dionysius was his lack of education. His father, afraid even of his own heir if given the training and entourage befitting a future ruler, had kept him confined to the palace in a seclusion devoted to the unambitious and unexciting pursuit of carpentry. Now, at twenty-eight, he was

like a boy who has just left school and is given unlimited opportunity of indulging in wine, women, and song. But if his mind could only be turned away from these to liberal studies, and be educated in the right ideas and ideals! True, he was not exactly a child offering the educationist the *tabula rasa* he dreams of for his experiments. But in the circumstances in which he had been brought up he was *like* a child. Moreover, he had the intelligence that could profit from education. If that education were given by a Plato! Why, then Dionysius might become a philosopher, and the miracle of the union of philosophy and power in one and the same person, and that, too, in a ruler of a great empire, might take place! What a change that would mean to the happiness of the world! What a witness to the efficacy of philosophy! What an object lesson to the world, barbarian as well as Greek, showing that happiness and prosperity, for the community as for the individual, come only from the rule of wisdom and righteousness!

First he fired Dionysius himself with his own hopes and got him to write to Plato beseeching him to come. Then he wrote himself, and shared his thoughts with the philosopher. The miracle, he reminded him, was possible with the help of the gods. Indeed, the present occasion was already a miracle. What need to wait for another? Dionysius was already keen on philosophy, and Dion's own nephews and friends could easily be won over to philosophy

and they would help further to get Dionysius. The Pythagoreans from Italy also wrote to the same effect; and Archytas himself was no doubt interested, for the affair was of international importance. What would it not be possible to achieve for civilization through an alliance between an empire paternally governed by a philosophic autocrat and a democracy led by a philosophic statesman!

Plato leaves us in no doubt about his own feeling in the matter, one of extreme reluctance, nor about his motives, duty and self-respect. He was a man of sixty who had found his vocation, a noble one, which he had now followed for twenty years. This he was now invited to leave in order to undertake a long and irksome journey which would bring him under the rule of a dictatorship, a form of government most inconsistent with his political principles. Dionysius might be enthusiastic, but the enthusiasms of youth he knew to be fickle. Dion, however, was serious and reliable, because of his character and his years. Moreover, he was his friend and a friend needing and appealing for his help as a mediator who by his philosophy could incline young men to righteousness and concord. And this, he fully agreed with Dion, might be philosophy's great chance: a ruler of an empire would bear witness to it, and thus it would come to be honoured by the many. Therefore he must not let philosophy down through his own cowardice.[1] Above all, it should not be possible

[1] *Epistle II.*, 312*a*.

for any one to say that he was a mere theorist, one who shrank from putting his hand to any practical task. This last consideration, he assures us, was the determining one.

The royal reception given to the philosopher—a state coach conducted him from the cruiser to the palace, and a special sacrifice was offered to mark the good fortune of the empire—advertized to the world the alliance between philosophy and power. Sumptuary sobriety and moderation at court, a new clemency in the details of administration, and the coming into vogue of mathematical studies and philosophical discussion were its promising first-fruits. Nor was the heart of the problem left long untouched. In accordance with the fundamental principle of their philosophy that the system depended on the individual, Plato and Dion soon tactfully set about showing Dionysius that he must start with himself, and so order the details of his life that friendship might be possible first with himself (for he was now his own worst enemy) and then with others: instead of following in his father's footsteps, he must aspire after an empire based on goodwill and loyalty and not on fear. As for the system itself, we shall miss the valuable lesson which this story has especially for our immediate times if we allow ourselves to think that, just because they had vision and thought a miracle possible, Plato and Dion were at any time visionaries. On the contrary, nothing is more striking in Plato's letters than the

sane statesmanlike policy which both he and Dion wished to pursue for Sicily, nor is there anything more strictly scientific in his dialogues than his realistic appreciation of the processes of history. For the near future he and Dion aspired after nothing more ambitious than the gradual transformation of the autocracy into a monarchy limited by a constitution resembling that of Sparta and combining the principles of authoritarianism, oligarchy, and democracy, a "mixture" which they would undoubtedly have declared to be realized in something as solid, as prosaic, and as little visionary as the British Constitution. Nor can there be any reasonable doubt that they would have succeeded, had they had to deal with Dionysius only. But, as is the case with most despotisms, the despot himself was the least part of the problem. There were also those to reckon with (including the army) who had vested interests in the dictatorship. Foreseeing that "culture" was going to become the order of the day, they had even, in anticipation of the philosopher's visit, got back from his exile in Italy a littérateur, Philistus, to champion their cause and keep them in countenance. Now they even raised the cry of patriotism. Athens, they indignantly protested, whose invading armada and army had been ignominiously defeated in Sicily in the Great War, would now win, forsooth, through one professor whom she had sent to talk Dionysius out of his mighty army and navy! As for Dion, it was plain enough what his

game was : he wanted to sell Dionysius an intangible scholastic and geometric bliss for the very solid blessing of empire and wealth which he would keep for himself or his nephews. In the end their calumnies against Dion prevailed with the tyrant, who must all the time have been suffering acutely from inferiority feeling in relation to him, and Dion had to leave the country, although, to preserve appearances, he was supposed to be going, not into exile, but on a visit. With the departure of his friend, for whose sake chiefly he had come, Plato felt that his own work was at an end. He did not feel disposed to play the part of a vizier, especially as he would have had to intrigue against a whole mob of courtiers who, in effect, ruled the autocrat. On the latter he had, it is true, established an influence. But it was a source of embarrassment rather than anything else, and very far from what he as a philosopher desired. It depended in fact on a schoolboyish hero-worship, almost a schoolgirl passion, one feels inclined to say, on the part of Dionysius, full of fits of jealousy and temper which led to frequent scenes of quarrelling and reconciliation. As soon as he could get away, at the end of the year, Plato left for home on the understanding that in a year's time Dionysius would, after finishing the war which had meanwhile arisen, ask him and Dion to return.

Five years elapsed before the invitation came. In this interval we find Plato carrying on a friendly correspondence with the tyrant, executing commis-

sions for him, guiding him in his studies, admonishing him by examples drawn from history and fable on the subject of the proper relationship between ruler and sage, and of their joint responsibility for the good name of philosophy ; above all, acting as a mediator between him and Dion, who was now spending his time partly at the Academy, partly in visiting the different states of Greece, where, in the multiple rôle of Crœsus-philosopher-statesman, he was busy establishing many important semi-official connections and friendships.

Third Visit to Sicily : The Miracle fails

When at last the invitation did come, Plato's resistance to it, especially as it was only for himself and not for Dion also, was ten times as strong as it had been on the first occasion. But the pressure on him, applied over a period of a year, was much more than ten times as strong as on that occasion. A perfect flood of propaganda, consisting of letters from Dionysius himself, from Dion and his relatives at court, from the great Archytas also and his followers at Tarentium, was directed against the disillusionment and prudence of the old philosopher. All of these agreed in emphasizing one point : the marvellous progress Dionysius had made in philosophy. And, indeed, Plato was to discover that practically a regular school of Platonic misinterpretation had been

started at Syracuse with Dionysius at the head of it, and that it was his ambition to learn something of Platonism (a thing he had neglected to do on Plato's first visit) so as to be able to keep his end up in discussion, that was largely at the back of Dionysius' insistence. At last there came a cruiser with a host of Plato's friends to act as envoys, and with a letter filled partly with threats, partly with promises, about Dion's affairs in Sicily, all calculated to stop any further refusal on Plato's part and to decide him to come. Accordingly, pushed by the whole of philosophic Athens from behind, pulled by the whole of philosophic Italy and Sicily from in front, and burying his wise old head in the golden sand of his friends' arguments, Plato in a gloomy and sacrificial spirit set out for the third time for the land of Scylla and Charybdis.

His dark forebodings, alas! soon proved to have been only too well justified. He himself conceived of philosophy as something which required, indeed, high intellectual gifts, but was, above all, an affair of the steadfast, reliable, and sane will intent upon righteousness.[1] His purpose in coming was, not to work merely for an alliance between thought in one man and action in another, but to help towards the union of the two in one man, Dionysius. The coming together of the intelligence, the will, and the opportunity in one personality—this was the miracle in quest of which he had journeyed. Dionysius, on

[1] *Epistle X.*

the other hand, who by now had developed a will of his own, wanted to keep his philosophy and action quite separate, and to secure Plato's approval for both in the eyes of a world in which, as is the case wherever the profession of ideals counts for anything, "face" mattered considerably. Intelligent enough to take an intellectual interest in philosophic ideas, he had not enough will-power for the necessary sustained effort of thought, but only a vanity egregious enough to prompt him—after only one talk on the subject with Plato, which was all that philosophy was granted out of this so much striven for second visit—to publish a text-book on Platonism. He could have but little patience for Plato's contention that the truth could not be communicated by means of a manual, but arose as a spark which one soul caught from another after long communion and co-operation. As for the idea that philosophy or the much-courted philosopher should influence his decisions about the arrest and punishment of his opponents, the founding of colonies, and other such matters, it filled him with nothing but scorn. Were such decisions to depend upon his being adequately tutored in geometry? he asked angrily. The promises about Dion's restoration he never fulfilled, but, instead, he even laid hands on his property. Although for the sake of the tyrant's prestige the fiction about the affectionate friendship between the ruler and philosopher was sedulously fostered before the public, Plato's own position soon degenerated into that of

a virtual and not even honoured palace prisoner, and he even stood in danger of his life at the hands of the palace troops, amongst whom he was relegated, and who bore him ill-will because they thought he had come to put an end to the dictatorship. He was finally saved at the end of a year only by the semi-official intervention of Archytas, who sent an embassy to remind Dionysius that Archytas had guaranteed Plato's security.

Dion : Miracle and Tragedy

This behaviour on the part of Dionysius, aggravated by his taking away Dion's wife (who was his own sister) from him and giving her in marriage to some one else, brought Dion to the very limits of philosophic patience. Having collected a kind of International Brigade, which consisted partly of mercenaries, partly of past or present members of the Academy out to deal a blow against dictatorship, he set out for Sicily in 357 B.C. on a war of revenge.

Welcomed and supported by all the Greek cities in the country, he easily wrested Syracuse from the tyrant, though he could not expel his army from the castle. There were, however, in Dion's greatness an aloof austerity, a pride and self-will, a lack of sweetness and humour—defects Plato had hoped to cure in the Academy—which were not calculated to win and fire the heart of the man in the street.

Freed from the oppression of the dictatorship and incited by the demagogue Heraclides, the men of Syracuse clamoured to return to the free-and-easy, quarrelsome, irresponsible democracy of the good old days when they ruled their own rulers, and they were impatient with the ideals and the discipline, philosophic and military, of Dion. As the result of an agitation not only for extreme democracy, but also for the abolition of "economic slavery," the saviour with his Brigade was driven out of Syracuse. But soon he was recalled with prayers and tears to save the city once more from the enemy who were once again gaining the upper hand. He not only saved it from massacre and fire, but after the victory, when his own soldiers urged him to put to death his enemy Heraclides, who had been the cause of all the trouble, he made the occasion an opportunity for giving testimony to the teaching of the Academy. This, he pointed out, required not merely that one should practise goodness towards friends and those who were good, but also that one should forgive those who injured one and who did wrong. There was no evil in man, he affirmed, which could not be vanquished and changed by gratitude for repeated good deeds. Heraclides was glad enough to profit from these principles and faith but not to justify them. Once more he stirred up strife amongst both the people and the army, and once more this strife endangered the city. But next year Dion was, in spite of all, able to dislodge Dionysius' son from the

castle, Dionysius having left for Italy long before. With the taking of the fort he became undisputed master of the empire. The long-sought miracle had occurred. A philosopher had become a ruler, and the eyes of the whole world, as Plato tells him in a letter, were upon him.

But the success of the magnificent miracle play which the philosopher was to present to those eyes was endangered by the emergence for the third time of Heraclides. While Dion was meditating bringing about that mixed constitution which was to combine authoritarianism, oligarchy, and democracy, Heraclides raised the cry that democracy was threatened by this new ruler who was simply a new dictator. Exasperated beyond the limits of endurance, and not knowing what to do with him, this time the philosopher yielded to the temptation of the short cut which promised to secure the success of his work, and he allowed his men to set upon Heraclides. Their daggers, however, dealt a fatal blow not only to Heraclides but to Dion's own inmost life, the principles of philosophic virtue by which he was trying to live, and which he had professed before his own army. Henceforth he began to doubt himself, because he began to doubt his mission, and in consequence of this doubt the ingredient of authority which he alone could supply for his intended constitution came from now on only in a weakened form from him, and, unpopular as his personality had made it before, it was far less acceptable now

than it had ever been. At last taking advantage of this growing unpopularity to further his own career, one of his own supporters, Callippus, who had become his right-hand man, laid a plot against him. In 354 B.C. he was assassinated, preferring, writes Plato, to suffer from wickedness rather than to practise it, and falling a victim to a great man's ignorance, not indeed of human baseness, but of the extreme limits to which it could go.

The drama rolled on upon its monotonous course, a Grand Guignol play now of extravagant and meaningless horrors. Tyrant succeeded tyrant, murder followed upon murder, and civil war devastated the whole of Sicily.

Plato, an old man of over seventy when Dion set out with his army for Sicily, had refused to join in a war of revenge, declaring that his part must be that of mediator and peacemaker. While the war was going on he carried on with his teaching, worked out the more specifically Platonic part of his philosophy and wrote his latest dialogues, the *Sophistes*, *Politicus*, *Philebus*, *Timaeus*, *Critias*, and *Laws*. He did not, however, remain uninterested. Before Dion's death he wrote both to Dion and to Dionysius and did his best to make peace. After Dion's death he answered Dion's party with two pamphlets filled with passionately pleading wisdom, and counselling them to practice moderation and conciliation, to set up Dion's mixed constitution with Dionysius' help, above all, to put their trust in law, the vehicle in which he still

hoped that inspiration could be embodied now that the miracle of the inspired ruler had definitely failed to materialize. But it was advice given all in vain. What was beyond his and Dion's power, certainly these lost and harried sheep, whom he was now advising from a distance, could not effect.

The end of the sordid drama came only after Plato's death, which occurred in 347 B.C. In the year 344, when Dionysius had returned, and when, as Plato had prophesied would be the case, the Greeks in Sicily had nearly exterminated each other, and were about to fall a prey to the Carthaginians, Syracuse at last appealed for help to its mother-city, Corinth in Greece. From Corinth a sixty-five-year-old volunteer general, Timoleon, sailed with a volunteer army to answer the appeal. In a few weeks he took Syracuse and its castle from Dionysius, who was allowed to retire to Corinth. By the end of six years he had cleared the Carthaginians out of the Greek part of Sicily and had executed or driven out every dictator from all the Greek towns, to which, after recruiting their depleted populations with colonists from Greece, he restored liberty and democracy, both guaranteed and controlled by his own supreme authority in the background. When, in 338, he retired into private life owing to blindness, he still continued to exercise this authority, as a kind of hero or saint. He accomplished in fact what Dion had meant to accomplish, and came to occupy the position which Plato in the *Republic* assigns to the

philosopher-rulers in his ideal state towards the end of their lives. He was, however, no philosopher possessed of philosophic or inspired virtue in Plato's sense, but a soldier and the exact impersonation of what Plato called popular or second-rate virtue, the virtue based not on insight but on correct beliefs and established through right training and habits. On the other hand, the philosopher who had become a ruler had succumbed to the dagger, while the ruler who was to have become a philosopher, Dionysius, ended his life as a curiosity to all visitors to Corinth and the boon companion of prostitutes and chorus-girls. History's comment upon Plato's experiment was complete.

Plato's Failure

I have given this story at some length (though by no means at the length made possible by our materials and justified by its importance) in order to correct the effects of the understatement of philosophers. In the opinion of most philosophers it is no shame for a philosopher to be a mere theorist. Hence the practical failure upon the fleeting stage of history of the greatest philosopher that ever lived, one who was truly, to use his own description of a true thinker, " the contemplator of all being and all time," has been treated by them not as a commentary upon his philosophy, but merely as an insignificant accident. Plato himself, however, had a different standard

from theirs for philosophy. For, though in moments of weakness he looked upon the latter as an escape, he acknowledged that escape was defeat. The worth and reality of philosophy were for him shown in its influence upon the will and action. It was useful as an ingredient to be combined with these so that, the opportunity being provided by a miracle, they might together change the world. The kind of influence, on the other hand, which can be exercised through writing, that which consists in the mere communication of ideas, he looked upon as nothing more than the result of a by-product and pastime, while the meaning which the word " academic " has come to bear he must certainly regard, if he knows of it, as the bitterest irony upon the intentions, and the severest condemnation upon the ultimate fruits, of his life's work, the Academy. There can be no doubt that that work was not enough to satisfy Plato himself, and that, just as all his previous life had prepared him to feel the necessity and importance of his excursion into practical politics, so all his life subsequent to that excursion was tinged by the disappointment of its failure. That disappointment is echoed, it seems, not only in the greater caution and more pedestrian temper which characterize the political speculation of his later dialogues, but also in the general pervasive note of sadness, anent man's place in the scheme of things, which runs through the sublime serenity of his latest and longest work, the *Laws*.

That is one reason for dwelling on this Sicilian interlude—its importance in Plato's own eyes. Another is the importance of the moral which that interlude contains for our own immediate times. For in considering the reason of Plato's failure we shall be considering the reason of the failure of our own civilization, the failure which is now working itself out before our very eyes. For our civilization is mainly Greek civilization, and the latter is summed up in Platonism. By Greek civilization the Greeks themselves meant chiefly ideals of self-government, while we mean art and letters, and ought to mean the systematic analytical thinking which constitutes our philosophy and science, and for the original impulse to which we are indebted to the Greeks and to the Greeks only. All these things, ideals of self-government, art and letters, philosophy and science, are pre-eminently present in Plato. In addition he has the purest philosophy of religion that has ever been thought out, one to which Christianity is always either consciously or unconsciously recurring whenever it seeks an intellectual formulation for itself. Indeed, Plato seems to have been specially selected by destiny to serve as an embodiment of all that antiquity had to give us at its best, and to demonstrate wherein it fell short.

Where did it fall short? Can we supply its deficiency and how?

These are questions we can attempt to answer only after we have considered what Plato's philosophy is.

Chapter II

PREDECESSORS IN PHILOSOPHY

The Quest of the Immortal Physis : *Laying the Foundations of Science*

European science and philosophy began together in the sixth century B.C., on the coast of Asia Minor, where West met East, in the ancient and flourishing Greek colony of Miletus. It was there that Thales (whose date is fixed by the fact that he predicted an eclipse of the sun which occurred on May 28, 585 B.C.) meditating, probably, on the transitoriness of things, on the changes of the seasons, and on the war of the opposites, hot and cold, wet and dry, day and night, summer and winter, sleep and waking, birth and death, asked the momentous question : What is it that all things have in common ? What is the one unchanging, ageless, and deathless being underlying all these many shifting, decaying, and perishing things ? The term he used for that being was *physis*, the word which has come down to us in " physics," " physical," " physiological," and which later the Romans translated by their word *natura* when it had

come to mean pretty much what " nature " means with us now.

Observing, probably, the many things that come out of water or turn into it, or seem to do so (snow, ice, and vapour, earth " changed from water " in alluvial deposits and " changed into water " in dew, night-mists, and subterranean springs), he decided that the being out of which all things came and into which they all turned was water.

The fact that water is not reckoned by modern science the ultimate thing he supposed it to be, and that many of his observations or interpretations now seem fantastic, does not matter. What mattered supremely was the fact that he abandoned once and for all the old method of interpreting the universe by myths or fairy tales, which might, indeed, embody true intuitions and reflections, but which had no principle whereby to control and test their thought, and, along with thought, combined sheer fancy and miscellaneous suggestions prompted by feeling, by mere language, by the need to harmonize different traditions or even to provide divine pedigrees for noble families, and by many other motives. In their place he substituted the beginning of scientific-philosophic thought, that is, of ordered, systematic, self-controlled thought, in which generalization, supplied by intuition, stimulates and directs observation, while observation in turn provokes and controls generalization. Such thought the Greeks later called *logos*, and we too, after them, generally call by this

term any body of thought as soon as we think that it contains enough observations organized by generalization (*e.g.* physio*logy*, psycho*logy*, concho*logy*, etc.), just as we choose generally Greek words for all its technical terms. For such thought is scientific thinking, and scientific thinking, it has been said, is purely a Greek habit of mind. That is why as soon as we become scientific we naturally try to talk Greek. It is the great distinction of Thales that he set the fashion of thinking which is known as science, and which for some time after its commencement was not distinguished, as it is now, from what is known as philosophy.

This fashion was taken up and elaborated after him by a long line of intellectual giants like himself, men who were isolated from their contemporaries both by their towering intellects and by the strange employment to which they put them, namely, this unintelligible search into "the things above and below the earth," though in most cases they also earned their fellow-citizens' gratitude or respect by their more commonplace distinction as inventors or political counsellors.

The first of these successors was Thales' fellow-citizen and associate, Anaximander. Seeing perhaps the difficulty of identifying the *physis* with any one definite thing, he called it simply a boundless something, out of which, he declared, arose not only our world, but innumerable worlds. He also raised the question about the how of this arising and trans-

formation, and threw out the suggestion that it took place through the separation from the boundless of the opposites, hot and cold, wet and dry, etc.

After him Anaximenes identified the boundless something with air, which, according to him, when rarefied becomes fire, while as it condenses increasingly it passes into wind, cloud, water, and finally earth and rock. He was thus the first to lay down the explanation of change to which the others had recourse after the very possibility of change had been denied because of its mysteriousness, and which modern science still cherishes as its ideal, namely, the reduction of qualitative to quantitative change, and of the latter to motion or shifting. For condensation and rarefaction mean more and less of the same substance in the same volume and the bringing of particles closer together or the moving them farther apart from each other.

Pythagoras we have already had occasion to mention as the founder of the Pythagorean philosophico-religious brotherhoods in South Italy. Besides finding the solutions, probably, of some geometrical propositions, he made the great discovery of the numerical ratios which determine the concordant intervals of the scale, and he was so fired by its novelty that he was led to extend it beyond the musical to the cosmic scale. The unchanging *physis*, he suggested, was not one of the many changing things (*e.g.* water or air) which it was desired to explain, but something that was not of the same kind

as they, nor a *thing* at all. It was that which had just been discovered by himself to be underlying and unifying so many variables without being itself one of the variables or resembling any of them in the least, namely, proportion. That suggestion is the ancestor of the most fundamental constitutional principle of modern science, its *Habeas Corpus* Act, so to speak, namely, the principle of the conservation of energy. It was also the first sign-post to point science, which has been defined as the knowledge of the measurable, along the mathematical path which it has been pursuing more and more consciously and exclusively in modern times ; and from its inception, commencing with his own earliest followers, this notion of Pythagoras has intoxicated the votaries of science with the vision of that goal which they still find the most alluring if also the most elusive, namely, the proof that " all things are numbers " or the reduction of the explanation of things to mathematical formulae.

Heraclitus accepted the principle that the constant *physis* was proportion or harmony. He showed, however, that the harmony was one realized in the perpetual conflict of opposites and that the constant underlay an unceasing flux or change of all things. This flux was a circular one : on the downward path fire changed to water and water changed to earth, while on the upward path earth changed to water and water to fire. Fire was the fundamental substance ; and he identified it with reason and God.

Heraclitus had brought into prominence the ubiquity and paradoxicality of change. Parmenides, reacting against the flux theory, declared that being (which he thought of as body) was one, finite, motionless, indivisible and unchanging, without beginning and without end. Change, generation and destruction, he proclaimed mere illusions on the ground that they involved the possibility of something coming into being out of nothing or passing into nothing. The proposition that nothing can come out of nothing or pass into nothing is the permanent contribution which he bequeathed to science. It became the axiom which regulated the thinking of all his immediate successors, just as it still does that of modern scientists.

Accepting that axiom and taking up Anaximenes' explanation of change, which reduced it to shifting, Empedocles represented all the things that we apprehend with our senses and the changes in them as resulting from the combination and separation of four roots (called afterwards "elements," *i.e.* Nature's alphabet). These roots were fire, air, earth, and water, and their combination and separation were caused respectively by Love and Hate or Attraction and Repulsion.

Anaxagoras, on the other hand, while accepting the same axiom and the same conception of the nature of change, denied that one thing was more basic than another, and asserted that everything was infinitely divisible into minute seeds, each of which

reproduced or reflected not only the whole thing of which it was a seed (the minutest particle of gold had all the properties of the largest lump of gold), but also the whole universe. Only to mind he assigned a unique character and position. It neither mixed with nor partook of anything else, and its function was to organize, viz. to organize the universe. His great contribution to thought was the distinction between mind and matter.[1]

Finally, still in obedience to the same axiom, and carrying to its completion Anaximenes' notion of the nature of change, Leucippus (whose *floruit* is given as 420 B.C.) explained all perceptible qualities and their changes as the results of the combination and separation of an infinite number of colourless, odourless, tasteless, temperatureless, changeless, impenetrable and so indestructible "atoms" (*i.e.* "indivisibles") moving about in empty space and differing from each other only in shape, size, arrangement, and position, but otherwise consisting of one and the same *physis*.

With the atomic theory of Leucippus in the fifth century the search after the ultimate being or *physis* in the external world of things reached its culmination. It had lasted just over a century, and in that time it had established many of the fundamental principles of modern science: that of the one

[1] The interpretation of Anaxagoras' philosophy given here I have defended in an article entitled, "The Homoiomeries of Anaxagoras," in *The Classical Quarterly*, June–October 1927.

homogeneous something underlying all things (now called energy and no longer water, air, or fire), that of elementary substances (the elements are, of course, not the same as those of Empedocles, and the whole theory has been modified in the present century through the discovery of radio-activity and through recent work on the artificial transmutation of atoms), that of basing qualitative on quantitative difference (*e.g.* colour differences on wave-length differences), and of reducing change to shifting, that of the conservation of matter, and summing up all, the atomic theory (subsequently modified by the addition of the molecular and, in our own times, by that of the electron theory).

The Sophists : Laying the Foundations of Philosophy

With the Sophists that same search passed in the main from the world of things to the world of men. The first half of the fifth century saw the victory of the Greeks over the Persians and the new surge of life and wondering interest in themselves which come to men who have just escaped a great danger. It saw also the triumphant establishment and extension of Athenian democracy and the Athenian empire, which provoked in the man in the street the need for some general education to equip himself for government as well as stimulating his curiosity about

his relations to his fellow-citizens, with whom he was brought into such close and constant contact by the common task of self-government, and about the citizens of other States, against whom he came up as ruler and empire-builder. This interest in himself, need for self-cultivation, and curiosity about his fellow-men were satisfied by the Sophists or "wisdom specialists," travelling lecturers who professed to teach men *sophia* or wisdom, either wisdom in general or a particular wisdom or art, especially the art of public speaking, so necessary for the democratic citizen as a weapon both of offence and defence either in the assembly or in the lawcourt.

The Sophists did not form a school, and they had no common doctrine. But together they fulfilled one function. Through this teaching of wisdom they brought speculation, which had hitherto been confined to a few intellectual giants, down to the generality of men, and they turned that speculation into an exploration no longer of the external world but of man himself. If their predecessors laid the foundations of science, they themselves laid the foundations of what is now distinguished from science as philosophy, at least of all that philosophy which is other than the examination and criticism of the methods and results of the physical sciences.

In particular, through offering men the wisdom which would get them the good things of life or what was good for them, they started ethics or the inquiry into the good, and in starting it impressed

upon it two valuable characteristics which it always preserved, at least in its Greek form.

In the first place, by professing to impart to men, as part of that wisdom, *aretê* or the goodness necessary for getting the good things, they made of ethics the science of efficiency, power, success, that which men supremely want, and not, as it is apt to appear in the eyes of the generality of modern men, the justification of a gratuitous and unwanted goody-goodiness. For *aretê*, though it is translated by " virtue," does not mean simply " moral virtue," but covers all efficiency or excellence, and implies that character and efficiency are one and the same thing.

In the second place, they made of ethics an inquiry into absolute norms. For, just as their predecessors had asked what was the common, unchanging eternal *physis* underlying the multitude of different and changing things, so the Sophists asked what was the common, unchanging, eternal *physis* or absolute underlying the multitude of various and changing customs, conventions about right and wrong, and good and bad, codes, institutions, and laws, the multiplicity, variety, and mutability of which struck the Greeks much more in the fifth century than they had ever done before, in proportion as they came more in contact both with Greeks from different States and with barbarians. It is true that, just as the former search had tended to emphasize the variety and mutability of things and the difficulty or impossibility of finding the *physis*, so the latter

search tended to suggest, as, indeed, it does in our own day, that everything in morals is constantly changing, from country to country and from age to age, that everything in morality is merely conventional, relative, and subjective, and that there is no moral *physis*, or moral absoluteness or objectivity at all. Nevertheless, the very emphasis on the relativity of morals, together with the impossibility which men find of resting content for long with such a relativity, provoked, as it always does, the passionate quest for absolute, unchanging norms. That quest was taken up by Socrates, who in everything is to be thought of as the debtor, and not merely as the confuter, of the Sophists.

Socrates : Logic-Ethic

We can best understand the inseparable connection in Plato between the philosophic-scientific and the religious element if we realize that his inspirer Socrates, the father of European philosophy, of logic, rationalism, free thought, and even of scepticism (in the sense of taking nothing for granted but looking into everything), was the most deeply religious man we know of in the whole of classical pagan antiquity. The thinking from which his philosophy issued was specifically religious thinking, *i.e.* meditation, and meditation of an extraordinary kind : once when on campaign he stood motionless in the open

for twenty-four hours while his fellow-soldiers kept watch around him to see how long he would keep up his thinking; "Socrates is having a think" became a sort of proverbial expression amongst his acquaintances. He believed also in divine guidance, and was himself guided by a "daimonic sign" or supernatural intimation in all matters, both important and trivial. Indeed his philosophizing was a mission laid upon him by the god Apollo, and carried out by him as a form of worship. He came to look upon it in that light at the age of about thirty-five, when his friend Chaerephon on going to consult the god's oracle was assured that there was no one wiser than Socrates. Convinced that the oracle did not mean what it seemed to mean, Socrates set out to discover a man wiser than himself by questioning, one after another, statesmen, poets, artists, priests, generals, and others about the wisdom which they were supposed to have in their particular subject. One after another they turned out not to have wisdom or knowledge, but only a particular knack, on the ground of which they laid claim not only to particular, but also to general wisdom and knowledge. Aware, nevertheless, that he himself did not possess these, he concluded that the meaning of the oracle was that his mere awareness of his lack of them constituted his wisdom, that this was the only wisdom possible for men, and that in reality the god alone was wise. At the same time he grasped the fact that this awareness is the first step in salvation for every

man, and henceforth it became his life's work to bring that awareness to every man by continuing this questioning.[1] In other words, it was Socrates' mission to bring men to the stage immediately preceding conversion, namely, the consciousness of their own nothingness and worthlessness. For such consciousness, he thought, is a felt lack or poverty, and Lack wedded to hopeful Resourcefulness begets Passion, a daimonic or divine-human being which, acting as an intermediary between man and God, raises man to the contemplation of divine beauty, wisdom, and goodness, and enables him to beget true beauty, wisdom, and goodness, and to become the friend of the gods.[2] Like all the great missionaries, Socrates had the power to induce in men the conviction of sin, stirring the depths of their soul, and attracting and repelling them at the same time. "His words make me impatient with my abject state. He makes me feel that my life is not worth living. He is the only man who can make me feel ashamed of myself. I know that I ought to do what he tells me to, but when I get away from him I succumb to my ambition. I run away from him like a slave running away from his master. I often wish he were dead, yet if this were to happen I know I should be more miserable than I am now." This

[1] *Apol.*, 21*a*–23*c*.

[2] *Sympos.*, 201*d*–212*c*. Note the remarkable anticipation of the Christian teaching about the blessedness of the poor in spirit, who shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven, and about salvation through God (who is Love) made man.

is how the brilliant, blasphemous, and immoral Alcibiades is made to talk about him in Plato's *Symposium*, and in words like these Plato, we feel, reveals to us the inmost secret of his master's personality and influence.

Socrates founded no school and did no formal teaching. His " teaching " consisted in this critical missionary questioning, in the course of which he gathered about himself a host of friends and enemies of all ages, classes, occupations, and endowments. His own business, Plato represents him as saying, was not to produce ideas himself and impart them to others, but to exercise on other men's minds his mother's trade of midwife and deliver them of *their* ideas. It is this that explains how it was possible for such widely differing thinkers as Plato, the contemporary Pythagoreans, the Cyrenaics, and the Cynics to claim him as teacher, and that we find it so difficult to decide what exactly he did teach. In a sense we can say that he taught all that these thinkers taught, since in the mental sphere there is not the same difference between the midwife and the mother as there is in the physical. But we can also be sure that he could not have taught it in the exact form in which they did, since they are not consistent with each other. In particular, historians of philosophy have been perplexed by the question whether he was interested at all in the things with which the seekers after the *physis* in the external world dealt. He himself is made by Plato and Xenophon to say

that he could not have taught in the exact form in which they did, since they are not consistent. The knowledge which he called real knowledge he would have said the seekers themselves did not possess, partly in the sense in which a great astronomer with a fair knowledge of chemistry, for example, might say that he knew nothing about chemistry, meaning that that was not a subject he had made his own, or towards which he had made any original contribution. Certainly Socrates need not be taken to imply that he had no interest in these speculations, or no knowledge about their subject-matter in the ordinary sense of the word " knowledge," any more than he need be taken literally when he says he has no knowledge about anything whatsoever. Indeed, in spite of his professing only lack of knowledge and wisdom, his contemporaries came to him, as much as, or more than, to the professors of wisdom, the Sophists, for knowledge and wisdom on all sorts of things, including soldiering, farming, marrying, and the arranging of dinner-parties.

" Socrates busied himself about ethics and not about the *physis* in general ; and in ethics he sought for the universal, and was the first to fix the attention on definitions." This is how Aristotle sums up his contribution to philosophy, giving him credit for being the father both of ethics and of logic in one. We shall appreciate this summary best if we consider once more the contribution of the Sophists. They had looked for something constant in men's notions

of right and wrong, good and bad, and had had difficulty in finding it. This was because they had looked for it in one of the many particular notions, practices, customs, or institutions to be explained (*e.g.* monogamy, slavery, the existing relations between the sexes, always returning what has been entrusted to one, doing good to one's friends and evil to one's enemies, etc.). They encountered, in fact, the same difficulty as their predecessors had done when they had looked for the invariable *physis* in one or other of the many variables to be explained —water, air, fire, etc. Amongst these predecessors Pythagoras had suggested that the invariable was not a *thing* at all, as water, air, and fire were things, but a relationship, namely, proportion. It was an analogous suggestion that Socrates, who associated a good deal with Pythagoreans and owed much to Pythagoras, made to his contemporaries. This suggestion will perhaps be best understood by our own contemporaries if we put it in our own way. It is true that men differ widely as to whether a particular thing or class of thing is right, fair, just, honourable, or good. It may even be the case that a particular thing or class of thing is right, fair, just, honourable, or good at one time or in one place, but not at another time or in another place (*e.g.* it may be right to restore a sword ordinarily but not when about to be used for murder). Nevertheless it may be that the men who differ mean, or intend to mean, the same thing by fairness, justice,

honour, or goodness, and also that the thing which is fair, just, honourable, or good at one time and in one place but not at another time and in another place, exhibits the same character, or expresses the same spirit of fairness, justice, honour, or goodness as its opposite at another time or in another place, though differently (*e.g.* the restoring the sword for one purpose expresses the same spirit as the withholding it when about to be used for another purpose). That which is identical and invariable is to be looked for, not in one or other of the conflicting particular judgments or in the particular act or class of acts, but in the one meaning, or intended meaning, and in the one character or spirit. The things that we differ about, or that really differ from each other, are the instances ; what we must look for is the definition. To give an instance is not the same thing as to give a definition of a thing. This may seem a very elementary and not very important truth. Nevertheless, it constitutes the body and soul of most of the earliest Platonic dialogues, which are taken up not so much with trying to fix on any satisfactory definition of justice or virtue as with showing in every possible way the meaning of definition and its distinction from the citing of instances. Nor can we wonder at this when we reflect how very difficult it still is to get people to grasp this distinction more than two thousand years after Socrates first pointed it out, and how it still is through overlooking it that they imagine that the variability in the instances

proves that there is no such thing as constant, invariable goodness, justice, etc.

Socrates' insistence on definition meant in ethics the search for absolute norms. It meant, therefore, the setting up of ethics. For ethics is nothing if it is not the science of absolute norms. It meant also the setting up of logic. For the definition is the foundation of logic, at least as conceived by Aristotle.

Ethics and logic were for Socrates one. Further, ethics and knowledge were also one for him. For not only did he identify virtue with knowledge, but he also held that the true knowledge or explanation of anything consisted in seeing its relation to goodness.[1] He held, therefore, that all knowledge was part of ethics, the science of the good. Philosophy was for him this science. It is that belief about its rôle that has made philosophy, and has kept it alive. All living philosophy, therefore, has its remote source in Socrates.

We may sum up Socrates' contribution to philosophy and his relation to others by saying that the predecessors of the Sophists laid the foundations of science, the Sophists laid those of philosophy, and Socrates was the first builder of its superstructure.

[1] *Phaedo*, 97*c*–98*b*.

Chapter III

METAPHYSIC-ETHIC

The Idea and the Many

The distinctive contribution of Plato was that he took up Socrates' logic-ethic or ethic-logic and turned it into metaphysic-ethic or ethic-metaphysic by his theory of Ideas. It is not possible, however, to assert dogmatically that Socrates also did not in some form or other teach that theory or any of the other things found in Plato; for in the case of his relation with Plato, who was so sensitive and absorptive, and who so loved him, the difference between the midwife and the mother of thought-children was probably even less than in his other relations. Nor can we tell how much of Plato's philosophy in general and of the theory of Ideas in particular was not borrowed from contemporary Pythagoreans. For Plato's work is like Milton's. Everything in it can be traced to some source except the whole. And it is the whole that is distinctively Platonic, since his genius is supremely artistic or organic.

We shall best get from Socrates' preoccupation with definition to Plato's theory of Ideas if we ask, What does a definition define? For example, what does the definition of justice or goodness define? It defines the character or spirit of justice or goodness. It tells us what justice or goodness is in itself apart from the particular instances of it. The instances are many, but the character or spirit is one. An instance (*e.g.* returning what one has borrowed) may be just or good at one time or in one place but not at another time or in another place, but the character or spirit of justice or goodness in itself is always and in all places simply, absolutely, or merely justice or goodness.

What I have called here character or spirit Plato calls *Idea*, a word which has come to have its present meaning—of something existing in the mind—only after his time, through later Platonists declaring that the Ideas existed in the mind only. We may translate it by "form," "plan," "pattern," "kind," "species," "principle" (as used in expressions like "the principle of justice," or "of love," or "of beauty," etc.). We may also say that Plato meant by it what is meant by "universal" in modern logic and by "law" in science. Each of these words will give us something of what he meant. But one and all they fail to give us the core of Platonism, that element in Plato's teaching which no logic or science or poetry has exhausted yet. That we shall best get if we attend to the use in quite common speech of the second of

the two terms by which I have denoted that which a definition defines. That term is "spirit." We speak commonly not only about the spirit of justice, goodness, truth, beauty, but also about the spirit of mankind, of spring, of white, of trees, of birds, etc.[1] In each case if we look into our thought we shall discover that we imply the following. The instances are many, and they differ from each other, but the spirit is always one and the same. An instance very rarely, if ever, is all that the spirit can be, but at best only approximates to that all or imitates it: for example, even a particular white patch, tree, or bird is not all that white as such or trees or birds as such can be, but the spirit of white, trees, or birds is. An instance may lose or gain some of the points which go to make up the spirit, but to the spirit nothing can be added, just as nothing can be taken away from it (the spirit of justice, for example, cannot become more or less justice than it is). The particular may even come to be an instance of the opposite spirit, as when what is an instance of justice in one set of circumstances comes to be an instance of injustice in another set;[2] but one spirit can never become the

[1] We speak in this way particularly when we are trying to explain what it is that the artist or poet gives us. We say that he gives us the spirit of whatever he deals with. As he can deal with every kind of thing, there is a spirit for every kind of thing. The reader will find it difficult to apply to every class of Idea or spirit *all* the things that are here said about Idea or spirit as such. But this is precisely the great difficulty inherent in Platonism which this exposition is merely bringing out without discussing it.

[2] Of course, strictly speaking, an individual act can only be what it is, just or unjust, and, being inseparable from the set of circumstances in

opposite spirit (*e.g.* the spirit of justice can never become that of injustice). An instance (*e.g.* a white patch or bird comes into being and passes away), but we do not really think of the spirit (*e.g.* the spirit of white or birds) as coming to be or passing out of existence in the same way. In short, the instances or particulars are marked by imperfection, incompleteness or mere approximation, by variability, mutability, and corruption, by generation (*i.e.* coming into being) and destruction. On the other hand, each spirit is invariable, immutable, indestructible, eternal, complete or perfect, and one. In other words, it is, in relation to its instances, an ideal or norm, and the two words, " idea " and " ideal," both of which modern European languages owe to Plato's theory, were, in fact, originally synonyms.

It has also a different mode of being from the particulars, or exists in a different sphere, and is apprehended in a different way : even when the instances are material or bodily or have body (*e.g.* birds, trees) and are apprehended by the senses, we do not conceive of the spirit of them as being or having body or as apprehensible by the senses (*e.g.* birds have bodies but not the spirit of birds ; we see, touch, and smell trees but not the spirit of trees, which we intuit) ; on the other hand, even when the instances are mind (*e.g.* true thoughts)

which it occurs, it cannot be repeated. This consideration is not, however, raised by Plato, any more than it is by those who make this kind of statement to support their contention that justice and injustice, right and wrong, are merely relative.

or of mind (*e.g.* loving feelings), or have mind (*e.g.* just men), we do not think of the spirit as exclusively mental or psychical (*e.g.* the spirit of justice or truth or love is not confined to minds as its habitations). But in every case, whether it be the spirit of white, of trees, of justice, or of birds, the spirit has or is life and power.[1] That is precisely the point which is most essential to Platonism, and which is covered by the word "spirit," but left out by all the rest, "form," "universal," "law," etc.

This reference to common speech not only gives us Plato's thought in a nutshell, but also serves to show how deeply Platonism, whether derived from Plato or natural, is embedded in our everyday thought and speech. Moreover, it enables us better than anything else to grasp the most difficult problem raised by Platonism, namely, the relation between the spirit or Idea and its many instances. We do not think of the instances, whatever they are (*e.g.* white, men, birds, trees, just or good acts), as coinciding with, or as exhausting, the spirit of which they are respectively instances. Indeed, they cannot very well do this, since they are variable, mutable, corruptible, and destructible, while it is constant, immutable, incorruptible, eternal. As such they merely resemble it, imitate or approximate to it, and even if each of them were perfect we should still imagine a spirit which would be other than they and would be the common life of which they all partook. The spirit,

[1] *Sophist*, 248*e*.

while being something beyond the instances, at the same time also is present in or occupies each instance. It constitutes the whole life or positive being of the instance, yet at the same time the instance has something which is other than the spirit, in virtue of which it just is not, or just falls short of, all that goodness, for example, or white, or trees, or men, etc., can be, in virtue of which it is receptive of the opposite of the spirit which occupies it. This is the principle of its mutability, corruptibility, and destructibility. It is the other, resistance, obstruction, negation, or nothing or not-being. Thus every instance of justice, or tree, or bird, or man, etc., both is and is not (*i.e.* is in one respect but not in another, or at one time but not at another, or is more or less, or is in the process of becoming or of growing) just, tree, bird, man, etc. It is a compound of being and not-being, or intermediate between being and not-being.

What is true of any one instance is true, Plato held, of the whole world in which the instances occur, the world which we see and hear and touch and feel, the world of the senses (called the sensible, perceptible, or visible world), of change, of generation and destruction. It is both the external world with the many phenomena of which the early thinkers from Thales onward tried to find the *physis*, and the world of man with its relatively or variably just or good acts, laws, etc., of which the Sophists sought the *physis*. Plato tried to satisfy the demands of both. But, unlike either, he remembered the suggestion of

Pythagoras and did not make the *physis* co-ordinate with the many things to be explained : he made the Idea or spirit belong to an order of being different from that of the instances, and herein he is like modern science, which sets out to explain a visible, audible, tangible world, and ends with a common "energy" which is very different from anything visible, tangible, or audible.[1] Unlike the early thinkers and the Sophists, and rather resembling in this the atomists, Plato gave more than one *physis*. He gave one for each group of instances, namely, the Idea of that group. But ultimately there was after all only one *physis* for him too ; for all the Ideas, he held, are ultimately one in or under the supreme Idea or spirit of goodness.[2] Just as they are the principles of the being and perfection of all the members of their several groups, so, though Plato is not explicit on this point, and though there are difficulties about such an interpretation, we may perhaps interpret the spirit or Idea of goodness as the principle of the being and perfection of all the Ideas, and through them of everything in so far as it partakes of an Idea or Ideas. Thus Plato satisfied the demand of Socrates also, the demand, namely, that all explanation should be by reference to the good. In him the quest of the immortal *physis*[3]

[1] I do not mean to suggest any other similarity between the "energy" of science and the Idea of Plato.

[2] Called generally "the Idea of the good."

[3] For the connection between *physis* and the Idea see especially *Rep.*, 597*b–d*.

reached its true goal. It began with water and ended with spirit. It set out as an inquiry into what things are, and culminated as a declaration of what they can and should be.

Knowledge and Opinion [1]

For in the process of trying to know or explain, the nature of knowledge or explanation itself emerged more clearly, and the notions about it underwent in Plato as fundamental a change as did the notions about its object.

According to Plato only perfection or the Ideas can be fully or properly known or understood. For knowledge is knowledge of what is. The Idea or spirit of justice or temperance or bravery or goodness or beauty always is justice or temperance or bravery or goodness or beauty, and so long as we look at pure or absolute justice or temperance, etc. (*i.e.* at the Idea), and look with the vision or intuition of the mind which is purified from the confusion and hesitation of the senses, we have insight into the nature of each Idea and into the connections between each and all, and the natures and connections are self-evident. When our vision is sufficiently purified, so Plato held, we shall have understanding even of such Ideas as those of white, trees, horses, etc., and see in the same self-evident way their connections both with each other and with such Ideas as those of

[1] See chiefly *Rep.*, books v.–vii.

justice, temperance, etc. Such vision is both beatific contemplation and that which gives us practical guidance for life so that we can make our life more and more like that of which we have vision. The science which it builds up is dialectic. It is the only proper science.

A secondary and preparatory science is mathematics. It, too, frees us from our slavery to the senses and deals with self-evident connections. It does not, however, examine or understand its own assumptions (*e.g.* that of the unit or of geometric figures). When dialectic is complete it will give us understanding of these assumptions also. In the rôle he assigned to mathematics Plato followed the mathematical path which, as we have seen, Pythagoras was the first to point out for science.

Of the world of many instances, on the other hand, the world apprehended by the senses, there cannot be knowledge or understanding proper or pure, since it has not pure or proper being. Since it itself is intermediate between being and non-being, the apprehension of it is intermediate between science and nescience. It is opinion or trust in probabilities as contrasted with the reasoned certitude of the self-evident demonstrable truths of science proper. For, whatever we apprehend any item of this world to be, whether just or green or square, we also apprehend it not to be at some time, or in some place, or in some respect, or in some relation. Not only does it become something else even while we are

deciding what it is, but, in so far as it is apprehended by our senses, its character (*e.g.* its colour, taste, or shape) is actually determined in part at least by the condition of our sense organs and of our minds (*e.g.* what is sweet to one man, or to the same man at one moment, is not sweet to another man, or to the same man at another moment, according to the condition of the organ of taste or the experiencing mind). For this kind of knowledge, namely, sense-knowledge, Plato fully endorsed the theory which the great Sophist Protagoras advanced for the whole of knowledge, namely, that man (*i.e.* the individual) is the measure of all things, determining that they are and what they are. If they belong to the class of things which are called just or good or beautiful, then they have or have not got these characteristics largely according to the arbitrary whims and conventions of men, which vary from place to place and time to time and cannot be reduced to any system; here, too, Plato was in agreement with most of the Sophists. The "science" which opinion yields is bound to be a body of contradictions stating that things are, but also that at some time, or in some place, or in some respect, or in some relation, they are not just, or green, or square, or whatever they are stated to be. It is real science only in proportion as it is penetrated by measure or number, whereby we are enabled to handle and change things so as to suit them to our purposes,[1] or by the knowledge of

[1] *Philebus*, 55*d*.

the Idea of the good, which tells us how our purposes, practices, institutions, and laws fall short of what they should be and how we may put them right. Apart from this it is mere guess-work dealing with probabilities about what has been, is, or may be, and giving us rules of thumb for our practice. Its appropriate expression is the myth. For a myth does two things. In the first place, it is a story and so sets forth events rather than eternal truths. In the second place, though the events are only probable, yet through them, as through symbols or metaphors, it illustrates eternal truths which are certain and not merely probable, but which might be illustrated by slightly different events.[1]

By the science which is myth Plato means partly those empirical moral and political philosophies which try to discover the nature of right and wrong, good and evil, simply by bringing together and examining the various opinions, practices, and institutions which are, or have at any time been, current amongst men.[2] The more such philosophies try to get some consistency and system into their subject-matter, the more they become merely a mass of contradiction and confusion, in our own time as in Plato's. They cease to be this and become something like knowledge only when by the light of true in-

[1] For Plato's notion of the function of the myth see *Timaeus*, 27*d*–29*d*, 30*b*, 57*d*, 59*c*, 67*d*, 68*b*, 68*d*, 72*d*, 90*c*; *Phaedo*, 114*d*; *Gorg.*, 523*a*, 527*a*. The Greek word *mythos* meant originally narrative, not necessarily of what is not fact.

[2] *Rep.*, 493.

tuitions about right and wrong, good and evil, which enables us to measure, classify and find our way through error, they tell the story of how these opinions, practices, and institutions have arisen, and show how they have to be altered in order to be what they should be.

Partly by myth Plato means all that we call the physical sciences, going back to the mode of explanation in vogue for their objects in the days before Thales, but, as is customary with such returns, going back with a difference of penetration and profundity due to all the thinking which had taken place in the meantime. Although it may seem that his is a very depreciatory judgment upon the sciences, and one which is not in the least endorsed by modern thought, yet in reality it is very remarkable how he has forestalled the deliverances of reputable representatives of the most up-to-date science, about science. Such science declares that it is science only in proportion as it is mathematics, that it deals only with probabilities and averages, and that it has to make use of formulæ which contradict each other when we try to apply them simultaneously to one and the same phenomenon in its entirety (*e.g.* the corpuscular and undulatory theories of light), and which have meaning only in relation to the changes the scientist is enabled to produce in the laboratory, but are unintelligible apart from these, and nonsensical when generalized to extend beyond them in the way in which, for example, the relativity

theory is generalized by philosophizing scientists or sciolist philosophers. Above all, such science agrees that all its branches—chemistry, physics, biology, astronomy, etc.—will unite and yield up their utmost only when together they become a story, the story of how the world has come to be what it is; in other words, the story of evolution.

The Construction of the Universe

Such a story Plato by a Titan effort of the imagination tries to tell in the *Timaeus*, and it is consistent with his notion of the function of physical science that it is in this dialogue that we get from him whatever of such science he has thought out himself or borrowed from others. God, who is wholly goodness and nothing but goodness, fashioned the world because from his overflowing generosity he wanted to beget what is good. Therefore he fashioned it after a perfect model, the world of Ideas, which is here spoken of as an eternal living being. But he had to work upon, or against, negativity, resistance, non-being, which is here represented partly under the image of empty space, partly under that of chaotic undifferentiated matter. Because of this the world is not quite perfect, but only as good and fair as this negativity will allow. It is a living being with a soul and mind, and is the perceptible image of the supra-sensuous world of Ideas. It is

called a perceptible god, the one only-begotten world. Just as it itself is an image, so its mode of being is an image of the mode of being of its model. This mode is, namely, time, the eternal moving image of eternity. The constituent members of our animate and intelligent cosmos are other sentient souls or sentient and intelligent souls, the begotten gods—namely, the stars and the gods of mythology—human beings and animals. In them, as in the cosmos itself, intelligence abides in soul and soul abides in body, and it is in talking about their bodies and souls and about the relations between them that Plato gives us his astronomy, physics, physiology, and psychology. The boldest and most interesting part of the whole of this account is his attempt to show how the four elements, to which bodies had been reduced by Empedocles, are themselves derived out of empty space (or space filled only with random vibratory movements) shaped by God into four of the five regular solids by means of two ultimate simple types of triangle—the isosceles right-angled triangle and the triangle which is obtained when we divide the equilateral triangle into six smaller triangles by drawing the perpendiculars from the angular points on the opposite sides. For Plato, God is truly a mathematician whose fashioning of the world is geometric construction, while the " science " of physics is reduced to mathematics *plus* a tale.

God

The part of that tale which has raised the greatest controversy is that dealing with God. The Ideas themselves, especially the Idea of goodness, we have seen, have power, and the power, it would seem, to make the instances. Later philosophers, therefore, have been puzzled to know why God is needed to make the world of instances after the model of that of the Ideas, and some of them have even suggested that God belongs to Plato's myth rather than to his exact science. If we accept this suggestion, then, even if we can understand Plato the philosopher, we are depriving ourselves of the possibility of understanding Plato the man, who thought miracle not only possible but necessary, and who looked upon belief in God as so essential that in his old age he conceived of an Inquisition as a necessary instrument of the State for reforming, but also, if need be, for putting to death, unbelieving souls for whom it might be better to die than to go on living without belief in God. Both the Ideas and God are fully real for Plato. It is true he did not himself raise critically the problem of the relation between them. But we might solve that problem by saying that the Ideas constitute the nature or expression of God, and that, in fashioning after or through them, God is fashioning after or through His own nature.

That, in fact, is the relationship which William Law, one of the best Platonists, conceives as subsisting between God and Heaven or Eternal Nature.

As for monotheism and polytheism, they do not constitute a real problem in Plato, although he uses the language of both. For there is for him only one begetting or fashioning God. The rest are begotten gods, resembling the angels of Judaism and Christianity, and no more impairing Plato's monotheism than the angels impair the monotheism of these two religions.

Recollection and the Immortality and Reincarnation of the Soul

The process of coming to know, namely, learning, turns out in Plato to be as different from what we generally suppose it to be as do knowledge itself and the objects of knowledge. Generally we suppose learning to be a process of acquiring, in which one item is added to another until in the end we have the sum total. Now, there is such a process, namely, the apprehension of the many instances, *e.g.* of the many circular shapes or just acts. But this apprehension does not give us knowledge. For knowledge proper is knowledge of the Ideas and not of the instances, and it is arrived at by the pure intuition of the mind, whereas this apprehension of the in-

stances is reached through the senses. The Idea, *e.g.* perfect circularity or perfect justice, is not the same as the imperfect instances, *e.g.* the roughly circular shapes or acts of approximate justice, nor is it their sum. Therefore they cannot really yield us the notion of the Idea. The fact is rather that, because we have already got the notion of the Idea, therefore we recognize the instances as instances of the Idea and so as resembling each other, while these, being images of the Idea, bring into activity its notion, which is already there. Just in the same way recollection is knowledge of the past which we already have and are not acquiring now in the process of recollecting, but which in this process is being made active to the accompaniment of mental images of that past; these images resemble the past (*e.g.* our walk last week on the moors), but are not identical with it; the knowledge of the past also is not identical with this play of images, which is merely either introductory or incidental to it. For the understanding of Plato the above is not merely an illuminating comparison. Learning for him *is* recollection. It is not an acquisition of knowledge —the acquisition is only the apprehension of the instances—but a revival of knowledge.

This recollection or revival is also a revolution or conversion, the turning round of the mind and its eye away from the flickering shadows of sense reality towards the sunlight of the Ideas, which brings out and makes alive the vision which has

always been in that eye, supplied and sustained by the Idea of goodness.[1]

There is no *acquisition* of the knowledge of Ideas in *this* life. We must, therefore, have had the knowledge in some previous life. But at no time could acquisition of it have been possible, since the only acquisition that suggests itself, namely, the apprehension of instances, is seen to be an acquisition not of it but of something else. The knowledge must, therefore, always have been there. But then the soul which has it must be without beginning, or at least with only such a beginning as the visible cosmos and time itself had. Being without a beginning, it must also be without an end. That is to say, it must be eternal.[2] This is also proved by the fact that its proper function is to know the Ideas, which are eternal,[2] and that the knower must be like the known. Moreover, that it must be without end or immortal, we see as soon as we realize that it is different from and independent of the body. For then we see that the Idea of life is so essential to the Idea of soul that, were the Idea of life to depart from any particular soul, there would be nothing left in that particular case, *i.e.* we should have a case of the destruction of an instance, which would be annihilation. But Plato agreed with all the successors of Parmenides that nothing can pass into nothing, or that annihilation

[1] *Rep.*, 518*b*–519*c*.

[2] The eternity of the soul is not exactly the same as that of the Ideas, *i.e.* the timelessness described in *Timaeus* 37*d*–38*b*.

is impossible. In all cases of destruction or change (*e.g.* the melting of snow), he thought, we have simply the complete or partial replacement of one set of Ideas by another (*e.g.* of the Ideas of white, cold, and solid by those of the colourless, of tepid or warm and fluid).[1]

The soul, therefore, is like no other instance. It is intermediate between an Idea and an instance. Like an Idea, it is without end and without beginning (save such as the visible cosmos and time itself had); like an instance, it is one of many and is subject to change. The special position assigned to the soul should be remembered when we are inclined to think that Plato did not believe in the complete reality of the individual, just because he says that the instance is less real than the Idea. He did not mean this to apply to the individual soul, which is quite as real as the Idea.

The eternity of the soul of each mortal creature, Plato thinks, has a history, the history of its embodiment. Its embodiment is a reincarnation or transmigration into many bodies of different human beings and animals in a series of successive rebirths punctuated by purgative or recreative thousand-year intervals in hell or in heaven until it is sufficiently purified, when it returns to the heaven of the eternal contemplation of the Ideas, given to it at its beginning and lost by its fall, or else is condemned to an eternal

[1] This paragraph sums up the arguments of the *Phaedo*, supplying the connections which Plato, as is his wont, leaves to be understood.

hell as incurable. This reincarnation theory, borrowed from Pythagoras, is, however, given only as a probability, *i.e.* it is part of the myth or story. The eternal and certain truth which is illustrated by it is simply that as we go on choosing evil we become more and more like the evil and consort with the evil, and this is our punishment, whereas, if we choose goodness, we become progressively better and more like God and consort with the good and with God, and this is our reward.[1] The punishment and reward might, Plato would have agreed, take place in some other way than through reincarnation *i.e.* the eternity might have a different history.

What should be and what are, according to Plato, the doings of man's soul in its terrestrial home, the city or State, in which it earns either heaven or hell, will form the subject of the next chapter.

[1] *Laws*, 904–905.

Chapter IV

POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

The Ideal State

Pythagoras summed up his view of human nature in his parable about the visitors to the Olympic games. There were, according to him, three classes of men, typified by the three classes of visitors: the lowest, or that of the lovers of gain, those who came for the trading carried on at these games; the next, or that of the lovers of honour or victory, those who came to compete at the games; the highest, or that of the lovers of wisdom, those who came to look on at the show. Plato's practical philosophy, as given in the *Republic*, is the elaboration of that parable.

The nature of man, like the nature of anything else, can be understood only when seen by the light of its Idea or perfection. The perfection of man can be viewed under four aspects: it is wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice. These can best be examined as writ large in the State, which is simply the individual writ large, and which for a Greek of Plato's

day was identical with the city. Since they are aspects of perfection, we shall, of course, look for them in the perfect or ideal city, which is laid up as a pattern in the heaven of the Ideas and shown to the philosopher in his mystic vision of the Idea of the good, in order that he may limn forth its features by the art of government in this world of shadows.

If Plato ever did rise to that heaven, his vision was nevertheless strictly determined or framed by his experience upon earth, his experience of the world of shadows. In that world as it was at the beginning of Athens' Great War, Pericles had entertained and presented another vision. He had painted for democracy a brilliant picture of itself as a body of individualist all-round citizens, each of whom could with versatility, charm, and self-sufficiency play his part in the economic life of the community, and at the same time do the work of the thinker, statesman, and soldier, or "at least" be a critic of these; a body of citizens amongst whom law and order and even military efficiency were just the easy by-product of a full and free life of self-realization. Plato had, however, as we have seen, lived and grown up through the whole course of the Great War from its insolent beginning to its sorry end, an end which was also the eclipse of democracy. As a result of this, his vision is in its main points the direct antithesis of that of Pericles. His ideal city is built on the twin principles of hierarchy and

specialization, based on what he considers the unchangeable limitations of average human nature, and on the need for military specialization, while its virtues are so many different ways of expressing order, discipline, obedience, and the subordination of the individual to an inspired but absolutist and totalitarian State. If these ideas and ideals are fascist, then we must say that Plato was a fascist of fascists. We must, however, remember at the same time that our modern fascist States would horrify him even more than our modern democracies and that he would call them precisely what we call them. For he would call them " tyrannies," which is simply Greek for " dictatorships."

Class Distinctions and Class Consciousness

The ideal city is the result of a harmony between three classes of men, each of which is characterized by the predominance in its members of a different activity or element of the soul involving a different ruling passion and different capacities, and hence contributing a different function and virtue to the community.

The first class is that of the intellectual or philosophic men, the men of ideas or ideals, the spectators of the world of shadows and of the world of Ideas. In them the intellectual, rational, or philosophic activity or element of the soul is the predominant

one, whose ruling passion is the love of truth and whose virtue is wisdom. They are, therefore, the men who can provide the State with its wisdom. Hence they are the rulers or guardians proper in the ideal city, which is wise because it receives its direction from them through the other classes being obedient to their wisdom. This wisdom is, however, perforce a merely external thing to these other classes. In themselves these possess only a blind image of it—unillumined orthodoxy or right belief in the things which the rulers understand, and trusting conformity—together with its fruits, namely, the other virtues, safeguarded and directed by it. The rulers, on the other hand, along with wisdom, possess all the other virtues also, for the virtues are arranged in a hierarchic scale such that the higher entails for its possessor the lower, though the lower does not involve, in the possessor at least, the higher. In his philosophic rulers Plato posits a combination of powers and qualities which he freely admits is very rare indeed : the intellectual powers of assimilation and retention along with that of origination and with moral intuition and sensitiveness—itself a rare conjunction—united with strength of will, discipline of the emotions and appetites, and with the passion for righteousness, all developed to their full capacity only by finding the right constitution which will allow them scope for exercise. He recognizes that the qualities of the intellect and of the will are generally found apart from each other and from the

moral intuition and passion, and are then either ineffectual or disastrous. For the emergence in our world of the complete conjunction of powers, qualities, and circumstances which shall yield the philosopher-ruler he postulates, in his theorizing as he did in his action, the necessity for the intervention of miracle and inspiration.

The second class comprises the men of decision and action, the competitors for the prizes of life, for victory and pre-eminence. For in them predominates spirit [1] or the will, the assertive element of the soul, which can be the source of anger, ambition, envy, strife, passion, violence, and brutality, but which can also enforce the dictates of wisdom, vanquishing and taming the appetites and acting as the policeman of the soul against subversive and rebellious forces within, and as its warrior against its foes without. When it does this, it exhibits the virtue which we should call strength of will, but which Plato calls courage, partly to denote it as a military virtue, that of unquestioning obedience, but largely because, with profound insight, he saw that all weakness of will or slackness of spirit, in face not only of threats and pain, but also of temptations and pleasure,

[1] *Rep.*, 586*c*; *Philebus*, 47*e*. " Spirit " here has not got the same meaning as it has on page 57. I use it in this connection only because the reader will find it in most translations of Plato as a rendering of the word *thymos*. I should prefer " temper " both in the sense of " anger " and in that of " mettle," and, in fact, the reader will find " the irascible element " in some translations as an alternative rendering. Plato seems to denote by it both the seat of the emotions and what we mean by " will " or, at any rate, by " will power."

is the offspring of cowardice, which, in turn, is the offspring of inertia,[1] so that its opposite has a right to be called courage, and that we may with truth say that we have to *dare* to be wise. The possessors of this virtue, animated by the love of honour as their ruling passion, are the soldiers, police, and administrators of the ideal city, the auxiliaries of the rulers or guardians proper, forming with them the will and might of the State. It is they who are responsible for the courage of the State, *i.e.* its discipline and strength, the enforcing of its laws and ideals against opposition from its own members or attacks from external foes.

The third class is the working class, comprising not only craftsmen and farmers but also merchants, all those, in fact, who carry on the economic activities of the community. They are the generality of mankind, the ordinary men and women whose mainsprings of action are neither the passion for truth and ideals nor the love of honour, but the desire for existence itself, a desire manifested in the elemental appetites for food, drink, and sex, and all that is connected with these. These appetites Plato sums up as the appetitive element of the soul. Since money is the medium used in the acquisition and exchange of its objects, he also calls this by transference the money-loving or gain-loving element—the acquisitive principle we might name it—while those in whom it is predominant he calls lovers of

[1] *Laws*, 901*b*, 633*b*, 637*b*.

money or gain. The only activities appropriate to these, because they are the only ones for which they have any driving motive, are those which secure the means of existence or the objects of the appetites. These activities are therefore their contribution to the life of the city. They also contribute to its virtue. For along with the other two classes they share in the virtue of temperance, which consists in the discipline both of the appetites and of the impulses and emotions arising from spirit and in their subordination to reason or right opinion. The temperance of the city as a whole is a virtue for which all the classes are responsible. It is, in fact, the concord of the classes, which consists in the acceptance by the lower of the rule of the higher, and which makes it possible for the city as a whole to pursue the ideals of wisdom and the right quality of life, instead of either the ideal of military power or the ideal of material well-being, the life of mere ease, comfort, pleasure, and luxury. In the other two virtues of the city, its wisdom and bravery, the members of the third class participate in an external though none the less real way. They have a grateful reverence for these virtues and for their possessors, observing the limits set by them to their own desires, enduring the hardships they enjoin, and enjoying in return the existence, well-being, peace, and happiness for which they crave, and which are only made possible by this observance and endurance. They are the sheep guided and protected, against themselves as

well as against others, by their watch-dogs, the rulers and their auxiliaries.

Justice or Hierarchy

There is one other virtue in which the third class can share along with the other two classes. This is justice, the most fundamental of the four, since it enables the other three to arise in the city and ensures their preservation. It is defined as the performance of one's own function and not meddling with another's, or as "minding one's own business," by each element of the soul, each individual, and each class. It is the virtue of knowing one's place, and the morality of "my station and its duties." In short, it is the perfection of the twin principles of hierarchy and specialization on which, as we have already remarked, Plato in opposition to Pericles chose to build his ideal city.

That virtue decrees, above all, the strict separation of the politico-military and the economic functions of the State. The economic function belongs to the working class and to the working class only. It is, therefore, only the members of this class who, under the control of the rulers, designed to prevent the rise of either poverty or wealth, the two banes of every function and of every State, are allowed to engage in trade, own private property, and in general partake of either the joys or worries of the acquisitive

life. They are, on the other hand, completely excluded from power and rule, which belong exclusively to the ruling classes, the guardians and their auxiliaries, and to which the only relation of the working class is that of obedience.

The ruling classes, in their turn, are completely excluded from trading and the ownership of any money or private property. For, convinced as Plato is that salvation for States will come only from the union of power with philosophy or wisdom, he is almost even more firmly convinced that all the evils of States and their ultimate ruin spring from the union of power with property. The acquisitive principle in high places is for him the devil. It turns the watch-dogs of the city into wolves, and the city itself into at least two cities, that of the rich and that of the poor, carrying on the class war. In the healthy city, therefore, the ruling classes will be paid civil servants receiving from the rest of the community their spare yearly keep, and living and eating under communal barrack arrangements as though they were permanently on campaign. This institution of Plato's may lead us to call him a communist just as his emphasis on hierarchy and discipline may make us think of him as a fascist. Nor is it surprising that he should appear to be both, considering how alike are the two. We must, however, remember that if there is one thing which is more antithetical to Platonism than contemporary fascism, it is contemporary communism. The latter is based

on a completely materialist philosophy which is preached as a religion. The only good it can conceive is material or expressible in terms of material good; it aims only at the material welfare of society; it opposes the unequal distribution of material goods even more keenly than it advocates their equal distribution, its motive being the envy which springs from considering material goods the only goods, and from not having enough of them; lastly, it would abolish private ownership completely, while it would make the political function (*i.e.* the work of the rulers) largely economic, *i.e.* consisting in looking after the economy of the community. For Plato, on the other hand, the arch-enemy is materialism of every kind, and the function of the rulers is to guard us against it. For that reason they are to have nothing or as little as possible to do with money or material goods, because they are a defilement. These, however, are to be left to the majority of the population to enjoy, because it can enjoy little else.

But if Plato's communism is limited in that it applies to part of the population only, it is unlimited where it does apply. The members of the ruling classes are not to be allowed to have wives either. For marriage means the family, and the family spells private property, entailing as it does at once the home, that stuffy nest which encloses a private wife and husband, private children and parents, private brothers and sisters, private belongings, and crowning all, private thoughts and feelings. Moreover,

marriage makes of the woman a mere child-bearer and housekeeper, whereas in the interests of the State she should be free to perform the same function as the man according to her ability. Therefore, instead of marriage, the male members of the ruling classes will have temporary unions with their women colleagues, unions strictly controlled by the State according to eugenic principle and with a view to keeping the population constant. The children of these unions will be taken away at birth from their mothers, who will never be able to know them as their private children, and they will be brought up in communal nurseries and later in communal schools and barracks. Thus, and only thus, shall we be able to have a State with one mind and one feeling and without the division and separation of " mine " and " thine," whether in respect of things, money, relationships, or pains and pleasures, joys and griefs, ideas and fancies—at least in that part of it which matters, namely, the governing part.

Absolutism : Education

The government of the ideal city is absolutist, that is to say, unchecked personal government by its ruler or rulers. For such a city is guided by supreme reason, and reason speaks best through the flexible intuition of a person attending to the concrete individual situation and untrammelled by the rigid and clumsy

abstractions and generalities of the law. But the governors themselves are governed by their education, so that ultimately the government of the State is by its education. Indeed, as far as the rulers are concerned, the State is just an educational institution, or, to be more precise, it is public-school-cum-Oxford-cum-Whitehall-cum-Aldershot. Up to the age of eighteen the members of both ruling classes, male and female, receive a public school education in "music" (*i.e.* music and literature) and "gymnastic" (*i.e.* physical training, drill, dancing, athletics, sport). This education is not so much intellectual as a training of character, the disciplining of the will, emotions, and appetites. Then, after two years of military service, those who show intellectual promise and pass the necessary tests proceed to a university education which lasts for ten years, from the age of twenty to that of thirty. Its subject is mathematics, which, as we have already seen, Plato considers the right introduction to philosophy or dialectic. Those who during this course have shown their fitness to go further are allowed to study philosophy itself from the age of thirty to thirty-five, when their character is already settled and no longer in danger of being subverted by speculation. If they have passed this test also successfully, they at last join the class of rulers or guardians proper, holding for fifteen years positions of leadership in the army or in civil life. Those, on the other hand, who have failed in any of these tests or who have never proceeded to

a university education remain in the class of auxiliaries, which, however, in the nature of the case is not sharply separated from that of the rulers proper. The latter, if they have distinguished themselves worthily during their fifteen years of active life, are allowed to retire after the age of fifty to the life of pure contemplation, the contemplation of the Idea of the good. This contemplation is, however, not an idle or " academic " one. Rather is it the inspiration of the whole action of the State. For these elder statesmen are the men and women who are supremely responsible for limning forth in the earthly State the features of the pattern laid up in heaven. This they do partly by still holding office in turn, but largely by educating the rulers, *i.e.* by directing the whole government of the State, since, as we have already said, government and education are identical in the ideal State. Only after their death have they complete rest, and then they also have their complete reward. For then, the Delphic oracle permitting, they are canonized as semi-divine beings.

Such a State is an aristocracy if there are several men with the qualifications of philosopher-kings. If there is only one fit to direct the whole government it is an absolute monarchy.

Thus against the contemporary democratic dogma that one Athenian was as fit to rule as another Plato emphatically and nobly proclaimed the teaching of his martyred friend and master Socrates that fitness or goodness is knowledge, and that ruling is a special-

ized art and science to be carried on, not by mob orators, but by a selected and thrice-selected class of leaders, men and women chosen for character, devotion, and ability, tested in learning, obeying, and commanding, exercised in study, administration, and war.

Totalitarianism : Control of the Intellect and the Imagination

The government which such rulers carry on is not only absolute but also totalitarian. There is no sphere of life, at any rate of the mental and spiritual life, which it does not reach. The life of thought is, of course, identical with the practically life-long university education, and that education is identical with the government of the city and is ultimately controlled completely by the directors of education, the elder statesmen. Plato is not concerned for the freedom of thought but only for thought. Thought is true thought, and that is free just because it is true. Error, on the other hand, is not thought at all, and should not, he considers, be free to propagate itself. For to the end of his life he was very far from the realization that, like God Himself and for the sake of God, we must not only work for the freedom of goodness and truth but also allow that of evil and error. In his last work, the *Laws*, he proposes that materialists or atheists, as also those who deny the providence or goodness of God, should be punished

by imprisonment or death. Nor is art in the ideal city to be less State-controlled than thought. For it, too, is part of education, the education in " music " which is to lay the very foundations of character and so of thought also, since thought springs from character. The freedom of art, or art for art's sake, was a notion even more alien from Plato than that of the freedom of thought. Not only does he propose to control all art severely and to exclude some art completely, but he even seems to suspect art as such with a puritanism which appears strange in one who was a Greek, a professed lover of beauty and a supreme artist. But the strangeness disappears as soon as we look beneath the surface. For then we see that being artist and thinker in one, he was well qualified to know the fatal power of art to fill us with wrong notions precisely because it does not profess to teach but only to entertain us, and so does not challenge the critical thinking faculty, but insinuates notions while this faculty is lulled to sleep. He knew also the temptation of the artist to rest content with myth when science is possible, and to prefer the light and shade and confining warmth and closeness of the narrow world of the senses, and the oscillation of his own moods to the white light, steadfastness, unlimited spaciousness, and universality of the Truth. Nor was he unaware that art might most successfully corrupt character precisely when, as in the case of music, dancing, painting, architecture, and the crafts, it had nothing to do with even the indirect

teaching or preaching of notions. For if the difference between good and evil in character is a difference in the tension, tempo, rhythm, or attunement of the soul, then everything might depend on the tension, tempo, rhythm expressed in and impressed by art.

Such is Plato's ideal city, a State uncompromisingly absolutist and totalitarian. We must never forget, however, that it is *ideal*, *i.e.* one in which the rule is that of absolute wisdom and virtue incarnate. About absolutism and totalitarianism in States other than the ideal Plato has a very different tale to tell.

The Importance of the Republic

The above sketch of the ideal State is given in the *Republic* or *The State*. In his later works, the *Politicus* or *The Statesman* and the *Laws*, the one written after his own final failure in Sicily, the other almost certainly after that of Dion, Plato adds various modifications. They all enforce the lesson imprinted upon his own mind by those failures, the lesson of the danger of personal rule and of the need for compromise and conciliation. As in his letters or pamphlets, so in these two dialogues he emphasizes the necessity and blessing of law, which he considers the image of reason and the representative of the divine on earth, failing, that is to say, the miracle of the inspired personal ruler, and seeing that without a miracle we are apt to get leaders who are wolves

instead of sheep-dogs to their flocks. No man, he says, has naturally the ability to know what is good for society, nor, if a man knows what is best, is he always able or willing to enact it. Moreover, irresponsible and absolute power corrupts mortal nature through ambition and self-seeking. There is no true and free mind here on earth, or very little, and therefore law is necessary as a protection against the ruler himself. Communism also, and the principle of the separation of functions and classes, are replaced by compromise or the principle of conciliating and blending—the blending of private ownership and public control, of different characters in marriage, of age and youth, of classes and functions in government.

But to the very end, even in the *Laws* itself, Plato never abandons the ideals of the *Republic* as ideals or norms, but, on the contrary, he explicitly and vigorously reasserts them. That is one good reason for asserting that Plato's *Republic* is representative of his social, political, and moral philosophy. Another is that it is through the *Republic* rather than through any of his other writings that he is best known, and has exercised the greatest influence, in this country. For that book has been expounded at many of its universities to generation after generation of students who have subsequently gone forth to mould the life of their country as statesmen, politicians, civil servants, writers, priests, teachers, and business men. Hence, to some extent at any rate, it is perhaps not a mere accident that so much of Plato's

ideal state sounds full of echoes of familiar British institutions, any more than it is an accident that the Bible and Shakespeare seem to be largely made up of the commonest quotations in the English language.

The Problem of Evil

The *Republic*, besides being a proclamation of what man should be, is also a criticism of what he is, a diagnosis of the ways in which he falls short of his norm. It deals, that is to say, with the problem of evil.

In general that which makes evil possible is the resistance, obstruction, negation, or nothingness which makes the visible world of the instances fall short of the invisible world of Ideas. In man this negativity is particularized as the body or the bodily appetites summed up under the title of the appetitive or acquisitive principle. These appetites, when undisciplined, cause a disease of the soul, which is a witlessness of two kinds, mania or stupidity. Through this witlessness the soul fails to see good and evil for what they really are, and so chooses evil as good.[1] For, as Socrates said, no one goes wrong voluntarily, knowing wrong to be wrong.

Just as the features of goodness were best shown us in the ideal State, where they are writ large, so from looking at wrong constitutions or States we shall best be able to understand the evil in the individual. For systems or constitutions, Plato in-

[1] *Timaeus*, 86*b*, 86*d*.

sists, proclaiming a truth which we seem to have forgotten in our day, do not spring from stocks or stones, but from the characters and habits of individual men and women. Four wrong constitutions, exhibiting four types of evil, which we may contrast with the four virtues, are described for us. The order in which they are given is that of logical development rather than chronological, and each of them is to be taken as representing the fundamental moral characteristics of a type (*e.g.* of democracy or dictatorship, etc.) rather than as describing exactly and in detail any particular Greek State.

In conformity with Plato's general theory of evil, they are all shown to arise through the action of the acquisitive principle helped by fear undermining the will, the fear in question being the offspring in each later generation of the experience of the preceding generation ; the passion for acquisition more and more interferes with and gradually displaces the passion for truth and righteousness as the guiding principle of life. In other words, the trouble is always a materialistic outlook on life. Thus we see that Plato explains all evil, but not good, in economic terms. To the extent to which history is the story of evil, we may say that he believed in the economic interpretation of history.

He is thoroughly consistent with one of the most important items of Platonism, the theory that learning is only recollection, when he implies, as he does in this connection, that experience by itself does not

breed wisdom: if wisdom is not already there, experience merely begets fear which sends us scuttling from one folly to its opposite. He also shows acute observation in interpreting history as the result largely of reaction: what mainly determines the special character of each generation is the fear of the youth of following in the footsteps of their fathers.

Militarism

The first of the wrong States Plato describes as Spartan and calls timocratic. "Militarist" is the adjective that best sums up what we are told about it. It arises though the acquisitive principle corrupting spirit, which then ousts the rational element of the soul from its throne, and substitutes its own ideals in the place of the passion for truth and righteousness. Private property is introduced amongst the two ruling classes, which together proceed to enslave the working class. War is the occupation of the State, and conquest is its ideal. The military type of man comes to the top in it, while intellect is distrusted and a contempt for culture and the cult of "toughness" become the fashion.

The typical timocratic man is produced by the fear of following in the footsteps of his father who has lived in unhonoured obscurity because, being a good man, he shunned public life in a State already becoming corrupt. He is ambitious, assertive, and

proud, brutal to his inferiors, but very submissive to authority, seeking rule and office (hence the designation " timocratic ") and basing his claims on military service and military ability, fond of sport and of the chase, and hating ideas and discussion, secretly covetous and self-indulgent because trained under the discipline not of reason but of force. He bears, in short, a remarkable resemblance to what we in this country think the Nazi is or would have himself be, just as his State bears a remarkable resemblance to our picture of the Nazi régime.

Capitalism

The second State, which Plato calls oligarchic, is the expression of the complete triumph of the acquisitive principle. The latter has ascended the throne of reason, and has enslaved both the rational element and spirit to itself, in the sense that the acquisitive values prevail, and that all thought and will are directed to acquisition. The only morality, discipline, or restraint is that of fear or prudence. The characteristics of the State are : the basing of political rights and privileges on property qualifications ; the confusion and combination of functions ; the absence of public spirit ; the presence of a large dispossessed, disfranchised, and unemployed proletariat, from whom are recruited the beggar and the criminal classes, both of them kept down by

force and fear; last and crowning all, the preaching of class war fed on discontent and on contempt for the degenerate rich.

The oligarchic individual is one whom fear, inspired by the sight of his father's ruin in public life, has made shy of all ambition and has inclined to look for security in a business career. He is not only thrifty and industrious but also close-fisted and avaricious, and a philistine with no values save money values. His morality consists simply in the restraint put upon those economically unproductive appetites which will land him into unnecessary expense, get him into trouble with the law or damage his reputation. His character is a respectable façade covering a class war carried on by a few privileged superior desires which keep down a multitude of drone or proletariat desires. In short, he is of the clan of Galsworthy's Soames, or the "capitalist" with his "bourgeois" mentality and morality, while "oligarchy" is the "capitalist society," as painted in communist moralizing and denunciation.

The next two States, democracy and dictatorship, mark the progressive stages of the downfall of the acquisitive principle.

Democracy

Democracy is the apotheosis of the Periclean ideal of versatility and self-realization, self-realization

of the individual and of every instinct, appetite, and desire in him without any discrimination, selection, or restraint, but with perfect equality and freedom for every one and everything.

The democratic State comes about when the proletariat, being helped perhaps by ideological sympathizers from outside, and having acquired for leaders powerful spirits from amongst the ruling classes, men who have been ruined by their own extravagance and the profiteering of the rest, wins in the class war. Liberty and equality, freedom of speech, and being allowed to do what one likes and to live one's own life, these are its ideals. The results are a motley society of the most varied individuals, and, corresponding to these, not one constitution but a kind of Woolworth's of constitutions. As for the duties of citizenship, conformity to the law, and co-operation in keeping peace or carrying on war, each individual is naturally left to pick and choose without any one to dictate to him. And if he chooses a political career, no educational, moral, or intellectual qualifications are necessary; all he need do is to profess devotion to democracy.

The typical democratic man is one who has been brought up without true principles and culture under the cramping and deadening influence of the oppressive and narrow bourgeois morality and hypocritical respectability of an "oligarchical" father. Having tasted of forbidden pleasures and helped by an ideological sympathizer from outside the family circle,

who spreads before the young man's eyes the prospect of a rich, interesting, and varied life, the repressed drone appetites within him triumph, after a struggle in his soul, over the respectable appetites and desires. The stronghold of his mind, empty of all principle and judgment, is invaded by a whole host of impostor ideologie. There is a complete reversal of all his values for a time, and virtues and vices interchange names, shame being dubbed silliness, temperance unmanliness, moderation meanness, arrogance breeding, lawlessness freedom, prodigality munificence, effrontery courage, and so on. At first the good qualities are cast out altogether. But if the man does not end up mad, as he grows older they are readmitted, and bad and good are given an equal chance without any undemocratic discrimination. The democratic man lives for the day and the moment, now sampling the drunkard's life, now that of the athlete in training, now that of the idler, now that of the philosopher, politician, soldier, or business man. Like the city in which he lives, he is hospitable to everything, so long as there is no hint of any hard and fast rule, any compulsion or dictation, any " ought " or claim that one thing is better than another. In short, the democrats are ourselves, the rebels who have broken away from " Victorian " morality, while Plato's democracy is our democracy, at least as seen by its critics if not by ourselves.

Dictatorship

With tyranny or dictatorship we come definitely into the realm of the pathological. For dictatorship is madness, the madness of the acquisitive principle, the enthronement, in the place of reason, of some compulsive, obsessive mania emerging from its hiding-place in the unconscious. It is also the result of the madness of democracy and the nemesis upon it, the punishment of one extreme by its opposite.

In its insatiable pursuit of its exclusive ideal, liberty, the democracy turns upon its own executive, calling them " foul fascists " if they show any firmness and try to exercise any authority or restraint, and treating them with contempt if they weakly truckle to its desires. Authority and hierarchy disappear from every walk of life. Even the respect of children for their parents comes to be regarded as an infringement of liberty. Parents imitate their children, the old imitate the young, and teachers their pupils, for fear of being thought dictatorial. The very dogs, horses, and asses begin to go about with a democratic freedom and knock you down in the street if you don't get out of their way, just to show you that they are as good as you are, and have as much right to be there as you have. In the end the laws themselves, written and unwritten, come to be disobeyed as being inconsistent with liberty. In such a society the drones or " have-nots " attain

political supremacy, led by the bolder spirits among them, who rob the "haves" of their honey to keep most of it themselves and distribute the rest to their followers. Naturally the "haves" put up some kind of resistance, and in the conflict which ensues one of the leading spirits, the one who by extravagant promises has managed to attain the unofficial position of "Leader" of the people, demands and is granted a bodyguard or private army for the protection of his life and person. With the granting of the private army the dictatorship has begun. In the first few days the dictator is hail-fellow-well-met with everybody (except, of course, his enemies, who are put to death if they have not already fled the country), and he carries out certain of the promised economic reforms. But soon he starts on a career of war and conquest to keep the people in need of a leader and too busily engaged in the task of earning a living and the money necessary for the taxes demanded of them to have time for plotting against him. As he becomes more and more unpopular he becomes also more and more afraid, and proceeds to get rid of all those who have any influence at all or are bold enough to speak freely to him, even though they have helped him to his present position. Soon he begins to "purge" the city of every man who has any quality, whether of character or intellect, that makes for leadership, and he is compelled to surround himself with the worst elements of the population, who are dependent upon him for everything. For

his revenue he relies at first upon the confiscation of the property of temples and of executed individuals, but in the end he has to live on the disarmed and enslaved common people which has begotten him and placed him where he is in order to feed its own appetites for liberty and self-indulgence.

To understand the psychology of the dictatorial type of man we must take a glance at the unconscious. Amongst the drone desires and appetites there are innate in every one of us some abnormal or unlawful ones condemned by public opinion and the law and repressed by the superior desires co-operating with reason. From some of us they are completely expelled, but in most of us they remain in a weakened and quiescent form and wake only in our sleep, when the rational and civilized element of the soul is asleep and when they are consequently free from all restraint of shame and decency. They are such desires as those for incest, sodomy, murder, cannibalism, etc. These were the only ones that were restrained by the democratic man. But his son, afraid of being hampered by the prejudices of his father, goes one better than he in the matter of liberty : everything in him is to be free. He leads accordingly a life of unrestrained licence, and in the course of this some frenzied lust arises which, with the other drone desires as its bodyguard, seizes the citadel of his soul, purges it of all scruples and of every shred of decency, and establishes itself there as undisputed dictator. Like the drunken or the mentally deranged man, he

is filled by his lust with an unlimited megalomania. To satisfy it and its satellite desires he is driven to every crime—thieving, burglary, temple-robbery, murder. He is the bully-coward-neurotic gangster or adventurer, always scheming and plotting, flattering or flattered, knowing no relationship except that of master and slave, incapable of freedom and true friendship, of honesty and trust. When there are many of him in one city, they are then the men who make the dictator, choosing for that rôle whoever amongst them is the most dictatorial of all because he is possessed by the obsessive mania himself.

Of all men the dictatorial man is the unhappiest, and the unhappiest of dictatorial men is the one who is in a dictator's position, just as the city in which he rules is the unhappiest of all cities. This is evident to us if we are not taken in by the showmanship and window-dressing which are so essential to dictatorship. Like the dictatorship State, the dictator's soul is enslaved because the best elements are subdued by the worst ; it is least able to do what it wishes, is full of strife, impoverished, and unsatisfied. If the misery of the State can be summed up by saying that its government is a reign of terror, the misery of the dictator is best described by saying that he is the most frightened creature in that State, with a reign of terror going on in his own soul while he is exercising the reign of terror in the State. He lives constantly either in the stationary prison of his

palace or amidst the moving prison of his bodyguard. Surrounded in the city by subjects who are his enemies, and encircled outside by States which condemn dictatorship and look upon tyrannicides with approval, he never dares move freely either at home or abroad, and cannot see or hear or enjoy what other people can. From day to day he grows more jealous, faithless, dishonest, friendless, and godless, the host and fosterer of evil of every kind, and the cause of calamity both to himself and to others. Finally, if this course of living is continued in long enough, the poor man's soul may become incurable and fit for nothing save to serve everlastingly as a warning to others.

It was Dionysius the First, it seems, who provided Plato with the material for this picture of extreme or devilish evil. Nevertheless, it is pretty much the picture which we ourselves have of contemporary dictators and dictatorship if we live in a democratic country, just as Plato's representation of democracy, drawn from the Athens of his day, is pretty much that which is held up to the eyes of the subjects of contemporary dictatorship States as the true picture of modern democratic countries.

The End of Philosophy

Such, according to Plato, is evil and such is good. And such is the end of his, and according to him,

of all philosophy—namely, to exhibit the nature of good and evil, and the relationship between the two, and to show us good as good and evil as evil so truly, clearly, comprehensively, and convincingly that we shall be led to choose the one and shun the other, and seek to be truly philosophic-aristocratic or philosophic-royal men, or at least members of one or other class of the aristocratic or royal State, rather than dictatorial men in the position of either slaves or dictators in a dictatorship State, in order that so we may grow into that state which is heaven or resemblance to God, and not into that which is hell or inveterate opposition to goodness and God.

Chapter V

THE GREEK CITY-STATE

Plato and Ourselves

It is not necessary to know the exact political, social, or economic conditions under which Plato wrote, in order to understand his philosophy about the State, or at any rate in order to understand it sufficiently to be able to apply its lesson to our own day, which, Plato himself would say, should be the chief motive for reading him at all. The reason is that he wrote not so much as a political philosopher or economist classifying and comparing forms, constitutions, and institutions, and tracing out their operation in detail, but as a moralist interested in the causes of these forms, constitutions, and institutions, and convinced that the causes were moral. The State is for him the individual soul writ large, and social, political, and economic conditions, forms, constitutions, and institutions are simply the expressions or results of the desires, ideals, and tempers, diseased or healthy, and pretty much the same in all ages, of the individuals composing the community. He uses "timocracy," "oligarchy," "democracy," "tyranny," to denote the coming to the top or the

coming into fashion of a certain type of mind or character. He uses them, in fact, much as we use "militaristic State," "capitalist society," "democracy," and "dictatorship" (the words by which they have been translated here) when we are moralizing, and are thinking either of no particular set or of a fairly large variety of sets of social, political, and economic conditions, forms, and institutions that might be denoted by one or other of these terms. We may therefore read Plato as though he were writing to-day, and that is the most profitable way of reading him. Nevertheless, it is interesting to bear in mind while reading him a few of the main differences between his times and ours, if only because by so doing we appreciate how very unchanging, amidst changing external circumstances, the problems raised by human nature are bound to be until human nature itself changes.

The City-State, Primary Government, and Slavery

There were two features of the Greek State which more than any others made it different from ours.

In the first place, among the Greeks the predominant type of State, the only one which received attention from their philosophers, was the City-State, whereas with us it is the national State. Although the Greeks knew themselves to be one in blood, speech, religion, and way of life, and felt themselves sharply distinguished from, and superior

to, the rest of the world, the "barbarians," as they called them, yet their oneness did not amount politically to more than does at present the oneness of European civilization. Politically they were split up into many independent sovereign States, each of them a city which was the home of all political life or of most of it, and which had a territory equal in area to a moderate English county and containing villages or other towns (or what had originally been other towns) either governed from the city or having a certain parish government of their own delegated from the city. Athens, for example, had a territory about equal to Derbyshire, and a population of about 300,000 to 400,000 (about the same as that of Leicester) living half in the town and half in the country, and divided into about 100 *demes* or parishes with a certain amount of local government.

The other feature which greatly differentiated the Greek State from ours consisted in the fact that, though representation was known and used in a subsidiary way, government was primary in the sense that the voters exercised their sovereign functions in person instead of investing representatives with them ; in other words, they themselves met and acted together in parliament or the sovereign assembly instead of sending representatives there.

These two characteristics, along with the fact that the Greek lived more in the market-place (the place of assembly and discussion) than in the home, combined to make political and communal life far

more intense, absorbing and ubiquitous in Greek States than it is with us. Of what it was permanently for the Greek, especially in the democracies, we can get some idea in times of crisis, when war or revolution threatens or is going on and when every one is called upon to do something for his country, and has some theory of what the country ought to do. Political terms, therefore, in a non-technical sense, while they denoted for them the same thing as they do for us (" democracy," " oligarchy," etc., have been borrowed from them),[1] denoted much *more* of the same thing : they were charged normally with more emotional significance than they are amongst us, because they stood for things that were more important for the whole of life and covered more of life than they do with us.

Slavery was an institution that in Athens at any rate was not important enough to make the State and society radically different from ours. Slave labour was merely an addition to free labour and did not replace it, the free population consisting largely of farmers and artisans. It was the source of the luxury and comfort of the wealthy Athenian, but was not the necessary basis of the political and intellectual life of the vast majority of Athenians. The case was different with Sparta. There the citizens proper, *i.e.* the ruling class, were a sort of warrior

[1] " Oligarchy " is used by Plato in a somewhat restricted sense, since there could be oligarchies not based on property qualifications, while " timocracy " is an invention of his own.

ants dependent as a State on vassal cities, which furnished common soldiers and tribute, and as individuals on helots or serfs attached to the soil, who cultivated the land for them. They themselves did nothing except rule and fight. The qualification for full citizenship, besides birth, was the possession of land, the revenue from which enabled the owner to contribute to the communal meals, a characteristic feature of the life of the ruling class, and to perform his duties in peace and war.

Athenian Democracy

In the fifth and fourth centuries, in the course of the long struggle between Athens and Sparta, which was largely a conflict of opposed ideologies, Athens was both the democracy *par excellence* and the champion of democracy. Her democracy, when fully developed, meant rule by everybody, *i.e.* by the assembly, wherever possible (hence payment for the performance of political duties to enable everybody to take part in government) ; rule by anybody in preference to rule by somebody special (hence the holding of office by lot and in rotation) ; rule by many bodies in preference to rule by anybody (hence government by committees). Payment for public duties, the use of the lot, committees—these were democracy's characteristic devices. The assembly, the juries, the council, and the magistrates (including the generals) were its organs.

The assembly consisted of all free-born Athenians in possession of their civic rights who had attained the age of twenty. Apart from emergencies it met regularly about once a week. Besides electing the executive that counted most, *i.e.* the generals and other military officers, it could pass decrees on anything, subject only to the control of the law-courts, which saw to it that these acts conformed with existing laws unless they themselves had repealed them.

The juries, recruited from amongst citizens over thirty years of age, manned the various law courts, which, besides administering justice, acted in a limited way as a kind of second chamber through the above-mentioned control over the assembly, and also exercised a strict supervision over the executive.

The council, besides having certain important executive and administrative duties and control over the magistrates, acted as the standing general purposes committee of the assembly, preparing and introducing all the assembly's business. It consisted of 500 members appointed annually by lot from amongst all citizens over thirty years of age who had not already served twice as councillors.

The executive, other than the council, consisted of a large number of magistrates. Most of these were appointed by lot and for a single year, and a second appointment to the same office was forbidden. They acted mostly in boards of ten. Although they had merely routine and ceremonial duties, they were

controlled with elaborate strictness, especially in the matter of finance, by the council and the law courts.

An exception to the general position of the executive was formed by the ten generals. These were appointed by election and not by lot, and they could be re-elected. They acted as a board, but could also act separately. For a special expedition one or other of them could be appointed by the assembly as commander-in-chief. Occasionally one or other of them might be appointed with extraordinary powers to be exercized independently of the rest and also of the council and assembly. Together they looked after all matters connected with the defence of the State and to a certain extent, therefore, also after its foreign policy. They formed the General Staff, War Office, Admiralty, and Foreign Office of Athens. As such they marked the limit of democracy which democracy fearfully respected. "The people knows that it gains more by being shut out from these positions and letting the most capable men hold them," observed an oligarchic critic of Athenian democracy. It was by continuous tenure of the generalship that a Pericles could turn democracy into personal rule while being the champion of democracy. It was on the ground of military necessity that Plato based, as we have seen, his challenge to the ideals of democracy and his insistence on the ideal of specialization.

Spartan Oligarchy or the Mixed Constitution

The champion of oligarchy in the fifth and fourth centuries was Sparta. Her own constitution, however, was regarded as an example not merely of oligarchy but also of a " mixed constitution " combining the principles of monarchy, oligarchy, and democracy.

The monarchic principle was represented by the two hereditary kings. These commanded the army in the field, but apart from that held a position of more honour than power, and were controlled by the senate and the ephors, the two bodies which acting together represented the oligarchic principle.

The senators were old and distinguished men, twenty-eight in number, who were appointed for life by the assembly. Together with the kings and ephors they formed a supreme criminal court, a cabinet for the assembly, but also a second chamber with power to set aside the assembly's decisions.

The ephors or overseers were a body of five elected annually by the assembly from amongst all the Spartans. Besides presiding over the senate, they wielded the most important executive authority in the State, had the general direction of its policy, controlled all ranks, including the kings, and supervized education, the real instrument of government.

Democracy was represented by the assembly. The latter consisted of all Spartans over thirty who

were qualified by birth and land for full citizenship. It voted only on proposals previously considered by the senators and the ephors, to whom also, along with the kings, discussion was usually limited. Its meetings must have been rather like those of Hitler's Reichstag. It elected magistrates and senators, voted on peace and war, alliances, and such rare laws as were proposed. Its decisions could be set aside by the senate.

The whole Spartan system rested on education or rather military youth training. This began at the age of seven and lasted till thirty. It established the principle of hierarchy or leadership and State control over the whole life of the citizen, which was a kind of permanent barracks existence. A good deal of this training was also shared by the women, who were more the equals of men than their Athenian sisters who lived under conditions very like the purdah system. The modern Nazi and fascist States, so like the Spartan in some of their ideals, especially in their militarism, resemble it also in the character of their youth training and in their dependence upon that training.

From this brief sketch it can be seen how much of his ideal State, as also of his mixed State, Plato borrowed from Sparta. In this borrowing he only followed the fashion. Critics of democracy in his time, and before, were in the habit of pointing to a more or less idealized Sparta for contrast, just as their modern counterparts make a practice of point-

ing us to idealized authoritarian States. At the same time it was only the Sparta which had existed long before the Great War that Plato idealized. Contemporary post-war Sparta he drew upon rather for his pictures of timocracy and oligarchy as well as for that of the process of corruption by the acquisitive principle gradually getting loose where before it had been strictly repressed by State control. (In the fourth century a law was passed allowing the individual Spartan to sell his land, which had hitherto been considered as State land allotted to him to enable him to perform his duty as a citizen. The passing of this law was followed by buying and selling, the accumulation of land in the hands of a few and the growth of a dispossessed class among the rulers themselves.)

Dictatorship Plato came to know as well in Sicily as he knew democracy at home. "Dictatorship," at least in our own times, best translates the Greek word "tyranny," both as a constitutional and as a moral and emotional term. The tyrant was one who, even if he benevolently or diplomatically kept to the law and some kind of constitution, was by position above them, so that he could say "*L'état, c'est moi.*" He had come to his position not by a recognized hereditary right (the succession of Dionysius II. was only like that of a robber son to a robber father) but by usurpation in the process of championing the people against the ruling classes, and he kept it by force, relying mainly on his bodyguard, which had also

helped him to power. Nevertheless, most of the tyrants of the seventh century at least had been very far from oppressive to the majority of their subjects, but had, on the contrary, been responsible for the increased efficiency and prosperity of their States, and had encouraged colonization, public works, trade, and industry and the arts. This, however, did not prevent the term "tyranny" from becoming the synonym of all that was most hateful with the liberty-loving Greek. Indeed, denunciation of the tyrant became a regular part of political piety. (Amusingly enough, it was publicly indulged in even by Dionysius II. out of respect for Plato on the latter's first visit to him.) At the same time, to the ordinary Greek, especially if he lived in a democratic city, the tyrant was a strange and remarkable man, exercising on him the combined fascination of horror and envy. In this, too, the Greek tyrant very much resembled the modern dictator.

Chapter VI

PLATO AND CHRIST

The Failure of Idealism

At the end of the first chapter I said that in Plato's own eyes his life must have been a failure, and I promised to consider the nature and cause of its failure after examining his philosophy. A sufficient reason, we said, for this consideration is the fact that his failure is the failure inherent in Greek civilization and working itself out at the present moment before our very eyes in our own civilization, which is essentially Greek. An additional reason, however, is that only such a consideration will provide us with an adequate criticism, and hence also with an adequate appreciation and understanding, of his philosophy, which, being a living and a life philosophy, is bound to be a reflection of its author's life. A further advantage accruing from this consideration will be that through it we shall be reviewing his philosophy once more, and reviewing it in an order which is the reverse of that followed hitherto, and which in some respects is far more illuminating :

we shall proceed from the human and practical to the divine and metaphysical, following the probable order of the growth of Plato's philosophy instead of the order of logical exposition.

Plato's failure is, in brief, the failure of idealism, that is to say, of the hope that ideals will succeed through the mere power of reason, intellect, enlightenment, education—in other words, that men will achieve them simply because they are shown them, because men must love the good when they see it. That is why his failure is our failure.

It is natural, however, to say that the one thing which he and Greek civilization lacked, and which we have is Christianity, and that this must constitute a great difference as regards success or failure. But Christianity as it is often presented, that is to say, as a philosophy about God and an ethic, is just Platonism and idealism. The crucially important question, therefore, is whether it can be more than this. What more it can be and how that more supplies Plato's deficiency and can prevent the repetition of his failure we shall see in considering the cause of that failure.

The Problem of the Many

Plato failed because he could not solve the problem of the many, and the problem intimately bound up with it, the problem of evil.

He did not know what to do with the man in the street in his multitudes, the common instance of the Idea of man. He himself was endowed with a rare intellect and a passion for ideals, and he could by the light of his reason guide further along the road towards the heaven of ideals men like Dion who already had the mind and will for ideals. But the thousands with whom he and Dion had to deal in Sicily, and on whom the success of their idealism depended, the ordinary men with vested interests in the dictatorship or with hankerings after a lawless and free-and-easy democracy, had no special mind and will for ideals, and with them the light of reason was unavailing, because they did not even have their eyes turned towards it, but had them fixed instead on the shadows. With them he and Dion could do nothing, just as modern idealists can do nothing with their contemporary counterparts. Such is always the limit of idealism. It preaches to the converted and perforce damns the unconverted because it can do nothing with them. It cannot even effect the conversion which it attempts, namely, the turning of the mind's eye away from the shadows to the light, since it can only show and not turn and it is useless showing to those who will not look. Still less can it bring about the conversion which, as we shall see, it should attempt but does not.

Plato's limitation is reflected in all the branches of his thought. First in the practical branch. His hope for man's salvation lies primarily in the one

specially gifted philosophic king, and secondarily in the few specially gifted philosophic aristocrats. As for the vast majority of the population of even the ideal city, they cannot really be full men. They stand only in an external relation to the perfection possible for man, ancillary in the case of the auxiliaries and passive in the case of the working class. That perfection works upon them mechanically, *i.e.* by a kind of force, the force of disciplined habit when it is not that of physical compulsion; and its work consists in repression, the repression of the worse elements.

That, indeed, is the way in which it works upon the many (*i.e.* upon spirit and the appetites in the soul) even in the philosophic king himself, for it is the only way in which through mere reason it can work. Reason is the light which points out the law; spirit, the policeman of the soul, still remains a policeman, though an enlightened one, and *enforces* the law, repressing whatever resists. Even the philosophic soul, therefore, is not good fully, *i.e.* in *all* its parts or elements or, indeed, in any save the philosophic element or reason. In fact, the philosophic soul and philosophic city are, after all, not generically or qualitatively different from the dictatorial soul and the dictatorship State. The difference is only one of illumination and of the incidence of repression, the worse elements being repressed in the one and the better in the other. It was because for him the operation of perfection was external, and

thus consistent with compulsion, that Plato, as we have already said, never reached the realization that for very perfection's sake we have to allow the freedom of evil and error as well as work for that of truth and goodness, unlimited all-embracing freedom being the sole atmosphere in which truth and goodness can breathe and grow.

If full goodness is not possible for everybody, it is not really possible for anybody. If we cannot solve the problem of the many, we cannot really solve the problem even of one.

Ultimately Plato's limitation appears also in his metaphysics. Here, too, he cannot deal satisfactorily with the problem of the many. Just as in his ideal city he seems to desire the unity of a unit, requiring the feeling and thought of the city to be that of one man, of the philosopher-king perhaps, so in the universe he seems to think that the many instances should be reduced in each group to their respective Idea, and all the Ideas to the one Idea of the good. Multiplicity in itself, it seems, is an evil ; the many are not only superfluous but wicked. Similarly, temporality, their mode of existence, is, it would seem, in itself a vice, a blot upon eternity. In the words of the Platonist Shelley :

> Life, like a dome of many-coloured glass,
> *Stains* the white radiance of eternity.

But in both these respects Plato's error, like all his error, is no more than a very thin and passing

cloud. He does not for a moment think that the many souls, even when they have become perfect, pass away either into the Idea of soul or into the Idea of the good, nor that they are any the less perfect for not doing so. He no more thinks this than he clearly thinks that the life of the members of the working class in his ideal city is not worth living, and should make way for that of the philosophic rulers. Nor does he imply that the existence of the many souls at the end of the series of transmigrations is a "timeless" one like that of truths or laws or like what Nirvana is by some supposed to be.[1] And he does not think that time and the temporal either will or should pass away. On the contrary, time is expressly, even though curiously, defined as the *eternal* moving image of eternity, while the temporal world of the many, we are told, is dissoluble by God only, who will never dissolve that which is well fashioned and good, such as is this world in spite of being made up of the many with all their imperfections.[2] Plato's position may be summed up by saying that he is troubled by what is no more than a confusing suspicion that the many and time are sinful just because they are many and time.

Part of that suspicion is the tendency to look upon the body (a kind of ground of multiplicity, one gathers, though, of course, there is multiplicity even without it) as the occasion of evil, and only the occasion of evil, just because it is body. (There is

[1] See above, p. 72, note 2. [2] *Timaeus*, 32*c*, 38*b*, 41*a*.

nothing in Plato to justify us in asserting that the body *is* evil or the *cause* of evil, however much there is in him to give us the impression that he *felt* that.) But here also there is nothing more serious than a suspicion. Where Plato deals concretely with the part played by the body in the spiritual life, that is, where he deals with the education for that life, and in particular with "gymnastic" or the education of the body, his ideal is not at all the ascetic mortification of the body, which has usually been the ideal of all those who have closely associated the body with evil. He advocates rather athletic training and attuning, a very different ideal, and one which implies belief in a positive and not merely a negative part to be played by the body.

The Difficulty of Evil

Still, wherever there is even a tendency to look for evil in the wrong quarters, this is deeply significant. It is symptomatic of an attempt to run away from the real cause because the real cause is much more serious, and because there is no hope of being able to cope with it. This is certainly so in Plato's case.

In his detailed explanation of evil Plato, we have seen, is constantly referring to the appetites or the acquisitive principle and giving an economic interpretation of history. But he himself expressly recog-

nizes that there are evils, such as anger, ambition, envy, contentiousness and combativeness, grief and elation, violence and brutality, which spring, not from the bodily appetites or the acquisitive principle, but from spirit, and belong to the soul itself.[1] Such evil is much more serious, because much more intimate, than the comparatively external evil springing from the soul's connection with the body. What is Plato's cure for it? He has but one cure for all evil, namely, reason, the light, illumination. But reason does not act itself. It is, indeed, according to Plato, endowed with passion and driving power, but these make for knowledge only[2]; hence it merely diagnoses the disease and points to the remedy. Its action is carried out for it by spirit or the will, the policeman of the soul. But what shall act when the policeman himself is diseased and will not act to enforce the remedy of reason, as is the case with the above-named distempers which belong to the soul itself? Plato has no real answer. Like all idealists he buries his head in assumption. He states that "by nature spirit is the ally of reason, if it is not corrupted by a bad upbringing."[3] It is the assumption of all idealists, that of man's natural goodness. With Plato it is a form of the Socratic dogma that no one does wrong voluntarily, knowing wrong to be wrong. This dogma is true enough in the sense that men do not choose wrong just because it is wrong as they sometimes choose the right just because it is

[1] *Rep.*, 586*c*; *Philebus*, 47*e*. [2] *Rep.*, 581*a*–583*a*. [3] *Rep.*, 441*a*.

right. But it is not true that we always choose the wrong or evil because we think it right or good. We often choose it, if not because, at any rate in spite of the fact that we know it to be wrong or evil, because, as Plato himself expressly recognizes in the *Laws*,[1] we care for something else instead of, or more than, for the right and good. In that case no amount of reason or illumination showing the good as good and the evil as evil will avail.

But, indeed, illumination is even more unavailing if we accept that dogma and give Plato's explanation of it. According to this the choice of evil springs from either mania or stupidity brought about by the appetites or emotions, and in either of these states a man, he explicitly asserts, is least capable of participating in reason[2]; that is to say, the light cannot even be seen because the eye is shut or turned away from it.

The problem of the many lies in the fact that the majority of men have not the mind or will for ideals. Where there is not the mind or will for ideals, reason is either useless or, at any rate, not enough. What is needed is something that does not merely address the reason, but can change the will and desires and so open or turn the eye to the light. Plato knows this well enough and, knowing it, he simply has no real hope for the majority of mankind in the world as it is, because he has no real hope that human nature can be changed.

[1] *Laws*, 689. [2] *Timaeus*, 86*b*–87*b*.

Improvement through Education and Punishment

What his hope is and what the rôle he assigns to reason we may judge by considering the means through which he expects the ideal to triumph.

The ideal city is to be established not by the many but by the exceptionally gifted philosopher-king who *has* the mind and will for ideals. He will, however, bring it about by working upon many, and his instrument for the work is education. Now, education is not just a matter of appealing to reason. When given by the man who has the right quality of life, education envelops the soul with the *atmosphere* of that quality, and through "music" and "gymnastic" it communicates to spirit or the will and the desires and appetites the *attunement and rhythm* of that same quality. As a result, *love* is begotten in the soul for that life, and later, when the soul is more mature and capable of reason and the principle of the life is presented to it, it both recognizes the principle because of its kinship with the atmosphere, rhythm, and attunement with which it is already familiar, and welcomes it because of the love. But such education, Plato thinks, is only for the very young. Therefore the philosopher-king must have a clean slate to start with. If he is to turn an existing city into the ideal State, all the inhabitants who are above ten years old must be sent out of

it into the country (to a concentration camp?).[1] In other words, Plato has no hope for the majority of men as they now are, and he would like to get rid of them.

Or rather he has one hope, though not a very real one. That hope is in punishment. Punishment is the medicine and education for grown-up citizens. It changes them. It removes the disease of their souls and makes them better men; it sets in tune the soul which was before out of tune. If only men realized this truth, then, instead of defending themselves and running away from criticism and punishment, they would accuse themselves, confess their sins in public and seek out punishment. But in order that punishment shall fulfil this, its proper function, the laws decreeing it must not be like harsh tyrants, using only commands and threats, but should have imprinted on them the character of wise and loving parents. They must replace the living reason of the philosopher-king of the ideal State by persuasive or philosophic preambles setting forth the reasons for the commands.[2]

The instruments for the education of the grown-up are the sermon and the rod. But how little real hope Plato places in them, at least as far as the city is concerned, may be judged from the fact that for so many offences he demands the death penalty.

On a cosmic scale these instruments are wielded

[1] *Rep.*, 501–2 and 541.
[2] *Gorg.*, 478*d* and 480*a–d*; *Critias*, 106*b*2; *Laws*, 857*e*.

by the cycle of births. In that cycle the soul is educated and re-educated by the rod of suffering, the suffering issuing from its own folly, and by the sermon which, according to Plato, is philosophy. In its successive sojournings in the bodies of men and women of all states and conditions, and also in the bodies of animals of every species, and in the thousand-year punitive or recuperative intervals in hell or in heaven, suffering and reward dispose the soul more and more to hearken to reason. If it chooses philosophy three times in succession, then, after three thousand years, it returns to its original abode where it contemplates eternally the Ideas. Otherwise it only returns there after ten thousand years, in the course of which it has had time to shed its folly. If, however, suffering fails altogether to teach it its lesson, it becomes itself a lesson to others by being punished eternally in hell.[1] How little hope, however, Plato has in the transforming work of suffering may be gathered from the fact that he nowhere shows that suffering can turn a man not naturally gifted for philosophy into a philosopher, which, yet, it should do, if, according to Plato, he is to be saved.

Plato's hope, such as it is, for the salvation of mankind may be said to come to this. First and foremost there is the Idea of the good, which is like an ever-shining sun, and the light of which is always showing the way. All souls, before their original fall or

[1] *Phaedrus*, 248*d*; *Gorg.*, 525*b*; *Phaedo*, 113*d*.

embodiment, have beheld the Idea and the light. A few, at least, of the embodied souls are born naturally good, with eye turned towards the light, and with will ready to follow the way. These can by art, the art of "gymnastic" and "music," so act upon the souls of the young that these recollect the Idea, which they already know from previous beholding, have their eyes converted towards the light, and are willing to follow the way. In the rest of mankind the same conversion is effected through ages and ages of suffering. In short, man's salvation is brought about by two factors, by illumination from outside him, from the world of Ideas, and by his own efforts and suffering.

Evil in Excelsis

But the problem of evil is far too difficult to be solved by man's efforts and suffering with no more help from above than illumination or a divine sermon. His own efforts and suffering are not enough if only for the reason that the evil to be cured is not within him only. The seat of evil, like that of good, lies in regions beyond him.

If instances of the just, of the noble or the good, of man, of fire, and of water, imply Ideas of the just, of the noble or the good, of man, of fire, and of water, then instances of hair, of mud and filth, or of any other worthless and insignificant thing imply

Ideas of hair, mud, filth, etc. Further, instances of evil, injustice, intemperance, cowardice, baseness, and even of non-being imply Ideas of evil, injustice, intemperance, cowardice, baseness, and even of non-being. This problem is raised by Plato, and we are told that we must accept the implications.[1] But though the problem is raised as a moral one, the implications are accepted from the point of view of science only. Far vaster, however, and more perplexing is their moral import. That moral import is never squarely faced by Plato. But it is at least indirectly suggested in one dialogue, the *Phaedrus*.[2] There we are told that the soul is assailed by evil while it is still incorporeal and where, as far as one can see, there should be nothing for it to be in touch with except the Ideas. According to this version, so far is evil from being confined to the world of body, that the soul's fall into this world is itself merely the consequence of its previous struggle with evil and of its defeat in that struggle. Evil, we must conclude, therefore, is somehow or other present in the world of Ideas itself, which consequently cannot all be subsumed under the Idea of the good or identified with the nature of God, who is nothing but goodness.

But against evil *in excelsis*, in or from the world of Ideas, the evil of "principalities and powers," if not also against evil in himself and his own world,

[1] *Parm.*, 130*b*; *Sophist*, 258*c*; *Rep.*, 476*a* and 402*c*; *Theaet.*, 186*c*.
[2] 246 ff.

man needs the help not only of the light but also of the *power* of the Idea of the good.

Plenary Inspiration : The Power to See and to Change

This brings us to the statement of what it is that Plato really lacked. *What he lacked was not a truer philosophy but a certain hope and experience. He lacked the expectation and experience of the concrete entrance of the Idea of the good into the temporal world of the many, the miracle of plenary inspiration which is not only illumination but also the influx of transforming power.*

Such inspiration warms and melts and changes as well as illumines. It does not merely present a principle to be *enforced* by the will, while the latter still remains the unchanged policeman of the soul. It changes the will from force which asserts and hammers into love which penetrates, permeates, and transforms. Its action is not mechanical and external, such as is that of mere reason even in the philosophic soul, but chemical, or rather vital and intimate. Since it has power to transform, it is not necessary that the person into whom it enters shall be naturally good or already in love with goodness. All that is necessary is that somehow a loophole shall have been left or made for the inspiration to enter. He may be a dictator (for it can enter into anybody) or, what

is more important for the solution of the problem which baffled Plato, the problem of the many, he may be the man in the street.

The illumination of this inspiration is of a special kind. It shows, not so much justice in itself, courage in itself, etc., but the particular right act to be done at the moment. It may, therefore, come to quite ordinary men, though they may not have the philosophic grasp which will connect the particular right act in question with similar right acts, and so be a vision of justice in itself or courage in itself, etc.

The particular act to which it leads is such as to fall into, or commence, a whole series or system of such acts not necessarily contemplated by the agent. This conjunction of acts or events, which is contributed to, though not necessarily planned by, human agents, may be called the plan of God, the miracle or divine good fortune. It constitutes the entrance of the Idea of the good into the world of the many, or the descent of the constitution of the model city laid up in heaven into the timocratic, oligarchic, democratic, or dictatorship city on earth which requires to be changed or healed.

Now, the wisdom which the city needs as a city, the wisdom which will guide, change, and save it, and which may therefore be called the wisdom of the city as a whole, is not so much the philosophic grasp but the intuition-impulsion which will initiate such acts, and which the ordinary man can have as well as the philosopher. If such inspiration is possible,

we may hope that every one, the man in the street in his thousands, and not merely the few philosophers, can fully share in the wisdom, and therefore in the rule, of the city.

Such inspiration solves the problem of the many, as also that of evil. It was because he did not have it that Plato could not solve these problems.

Plato's Lack of Inspiration

Plato's philosophy, however, allows for inspiration. Hence a criticism of his philosophy is bound to take the form of pointing to a defect not so much in his thought as in his experience, a defect evidenced by shades of emphasis in the presentation of thought.

According to his philosophy the Idea does not just exist apart from the instances, but enters them, and its entrance is sometimes denoted in terms applicable to inspiration : the Idea possesses the instances, and is present in them as a god possesses and is present in his inspired servant. But this suggestion is not worked out by Plato, and the relation between the Idea and its instances is generally presented simply as the lifeless relation between the universal and its particulars.

The Idea of the good, we are expressly told, gives us not only light or the truth and knowledge but also power, in fact, all our activity and life, just as the sun is the cause not only of light and visibility

but of the life of plants and animals. But, though Plato says this, it is obvious from what he says and from the way in which he says it that as far as his own experience goes the Idea of the good merely shines.

He believes in the intervention of Providence. Indeed, in the *Laws*[1] it is made a punishable offence not to believe that gods look after our concerns, even the smallest. We might, therefore, expect him to say that we can find out from the gods what to do about everything. But he does not seem to have had divine guidance like his master Socrates. Hence in so important a matter as sex he says, in the same *Laws*,[2] that it would be desirable to have God's actual commands, but implies that they cannot be had. The concern of the gods in all our affairs, it seems, is shown merely in seeing that we are punished or rewarded.

In his life he expected a miracle, that is to say, the real intervention of God, and it is, in fact, that expectation even more than his philosophy which shows the reality of his belief in God. But at the same time the expectation was strictly limited. The miracle was to consist simply in securing the conjunction in one man of intellectual ability, of the righteous will, and of power or opportunity. After this everything was to depend on the ability and virtue of that one man. Nor is any relation indicated between any previous act or state of ours and the

[1] 899–905. [2] 835*c*.

coming of the miracle, which is, therefore, nothing but a fluke. But limiting one's expectation of a miracle and completely separating oneself from the conditions of its coming is to prevent it from happening. Hence Plato never knew the miracle of plenary inspiration.

Inspiration of a sort he did know. Who can doubt it when reviewing his philosophy, so penetratingly and astonishingly true in the main, so unparalleled as a whole by all that went before, and so irreplaceable by all that has come since? Besides, by definition philosophy is for him from beginning to end the work of inspiration, love, and conversion. But his inspiration is of a limited kind, limited to the imagination and intellect; it is mere illumination. Conversion, too, is for him limited, a turning of the eye towards the light rather than a transformation of the will, emotions, and appetites. Limited, too, is his philosophic love. It is the ferment of the imagination generated by the sight of beauty, by the passion of the intellect for ideas, and by the mutual interest, stimulation, and delight of imaginative and intellectual natures. It is not human and of the heart, the love that softens, changes, and inspires the will both of its owner and of others and is thus power. It, too, is light rather than warmth. Plato, like Dion, was obviously an aloof and lofty spirit, breathing a rarefied atmosphere, and possessed of intellectual pride and scorn—a "highbrow," in short. Hence neither he nor Dion inspired or changed the

wills of others, certainly not of people of a lower calibre than themselves. Indeed, their own wills were not changed or inspired. In the Sicilian adventure Dion was partly actuated by the desire for revenge, while his nobility strikes us as even more priggish than the virtue of most Greek and Roman great men. As for Plato, according to his own account his motives were the sense of duty and self-respect and the spirit of resignation. Nor, while anxious to do his duty by philosophy, was he quite free either from the idea of philosophy as an escape or from the disgust with which the world that philosophy was to change inspired him. Such divided and negative motives are very different from the unifying positive power and drive of plenary inspiration.

His illumination also is very different from that of such inspiration. It concerns general rather than particular truths, and is metaphysical and poetical rather than practical. Hence the student of Plato cannot help being shocked by the contrast between his metaphysical and his practical philosophy. The former is alive with the stir of inspiration, and not the least thrilling part of it is the eloquent description of the philosopher-king's inspiration, the mystic beatific vision in which he will behold the Idea of the good and, in the heart of that, the fair city laid up in heaven to be used by him as a pattern for the State he is to build on earth. Naturally, therefore, the student expects, when shown this fair city, to be presented

with something wonderful and completely new, or at least something pregnant with unrealized possibilities and inexhaustible suggestions. What, then, is his disappointment on finding little more than a composite picture of the Greek City-State with its familiar virtues, prejudices, and limitations, a picture inspired partly by the Athens and Sparta of the past, partly by Plato's reactions against the Athens and Sparta of his own day, partly by ideas current at the time, something cut and dried and more like an artificial combination of partly distorted memory images than an original work of the creative imagination, the dream of the reactionary rather than the vision of the prophet!

His defective experience explains another striking peculiarity in Plato. This is his undecided attitude towards the status of inspiration. Sometimes, as, for example, in the *Phaedrus*,[1] while calling inspiration madness he exalts it far above the intellect or reason. At other times, however, by calling it madness he means to depreciate it as something vagrant and unreliable, as a thing which masters you and which you cannot master, almost as something which is bound to be charlatanism.[2] At one time he wants inspiration to have the same characteristics as the reasoning of the mathematician or of the dialectician, while at another time he wants this reasoning to have the same character as inspiration. In the matter of specifically religious inspiration also he wavered in

[1] 244 ff. [2] *Ion*, 533*d*; *Meno*, 99*c*.

a similar fashion. He seems both to have had and not to have had his master's belief in oracles, dreams, and signs. He partly distrusted and feared them because they were abused by charlatan traffickers in pardons and indulgences, who traded on the superstitions of the common people and represented the gods as bribable, a crime for which death is the penalty proposed in the *Laws*. No doubt Socrates had the same distrust. But Plato did not have that which Socrates had, and which gave Socrates a steadying assurance about inspiration in spite of all doubts and distrust and his own very critical intellect. He did not have guidance in practical matters by means of a supernatural intimation nor the sense of having a mission.

From Plato to Christ

What are the conditions of that plenary inspiration which Socrates nearly had,[1] and which Plato lacked? What are the things in ourselves which, though they are not its causes, are the contributory and indispensable conditions to the occurrence of the miracle, and which Plato omits to state, perhaps because he

[1] He had the guidance and the sense of mission. But the latter was negative only, impelling him merely to convict men of folly, and his guidance, according to one account at least, was also exclusively negative, bidding him simply to refrain from harmful courses of action. He lacked the constructiveness, fervour, and patience which are some of the ingredients of the power of love.

did not think out the question whether there are any? They can nearly all be got from him, though he himself does not mention them as such conditions.

They are the distrust of self-love (self-love is called in the *Laws* [1] the greatest innate evil in the souls of the majority of men), the willingness to admit one's faults and wrongs, to be criticised and chastised and to make restitution, and the readiness to be guided in all things by absolute standards, by justice in itself, honesty in itself, wisdom in itself, etc.

There are two conditions, however, which cannot be got from Plato. The first of these is the belief that particular guidance is both necessary and possible, and that with it can come a power which can change human nature—the power of love. The second is the simple asking for and expecting such guidance and power.

There is nothing in his philosophy to make one say that he did not believe in the possibility of this dynamic inspiration. But he does not seem to have felt his need of it. All he desired was apparently philosophic and imaginative illumination. A child of light, born, as some of the ancients observed, on the birthday and under the special protection of Apollo, the god of light, he was content with light. Blinded by the light of his own mighty intellect, and misled by the pride and self-confidence of intellect into a subtle form of self-love in spite of his

[1] 731*d*–732*b*.

own condemnation of that vice, he did not, it seems, ask for anything from the gods. Therefore they did not give him anything save what he had at birth, and because he neither asked nor got anything from them he had no real experience of the divine.

It is this lack of real experience which explains the peculiar fact that in his writings the rôle of the gods is as otiose as it is prominent, so that while some of his interpreters treat him, like the present writer, as, in intention and conception at least, one of the most deeply religious and theistic thinkers, others regard his religious language as simply a way of getting over to the gallery what is essentially a non-religious or at any rate non-theistic philosophy. Nowhere, not even in the Psalms, is greater eloquence to be found than in his *Laws* about the rightness of totalitarian submission to God, and the blessedness of totalitarian theocracy or God-rule over both the individual and the State. God, we are told, holds the beginning, the end, and the middle of all things. We should follow him in everything, holding ourselves lowly and disciplined. Whoever, exalted by pride, or elated by the possession of office or of wealth, or inflamed with insolence and folly because of beauty and of youth, thinks himself self-sufficient and not in need of a ruler or leader, brings confusion and ruin upon himself and others.[1] The best thing about us is that we are the puppets of the gods, and we should go through the puppet-play

[1] 716*a–b*.

which is our life nobly, making of it one long act of worship to the gods with dance and song and sacrifice.[1] But it is not clear what we are to ask or get through our worship, certainly not that we are to ask and get the power which will guide and change us and others. Service to the gods is, after all, identified simply with service to the laws laid down by the lawgiver,[2] and their worship is a State act symbolizing participation in the life of the State, and serving as an act of allegiance to the State. Plato's theocratic totalitarianism is simply State totalitarianism.

The experience of plenary inspiration or of the power which guides and changes us is the experience of Christ. What Plato lacked was not Christianity in the sense of a philosophy and ethics, for the philosophy and ethics of Christianity have always been Platonism of one kind or another.[3] What he lacked was Christ.

What idealism and contemporary civilization lack and what will save them is not the Christianity which is a species of Platonism, but Christ.

The aim of Plato's philosophy was to point men to the Idea of the good. The aim of the exponent of Plato who appreciates the truth of his philosophy, pursues philosophy in the same spirit and along the same path as he, and wishes to make Plato's path and

[1] 803*b*–804*b*.

[2] 762*e*5.

[3] Under Platonism we may include Aristotelianism, since Aristotle, especially in metaphysics, was always a Platonist *malgré lui*.

goal clearer for others than they were to Plato, with the help of the light that has come since his time, can only be to point men to the Idea of the good which is no longer the remote and abstract goal of the straining intellect and imagination, but which daily, hourly, and momently comes amongst us invested with flesh and blood, in living and loving. His aim, that is to say, must be to point the way to Christ. After Plato there is only Christ. In that statement is summed up the measure of Plato's greatness.

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This is, of course, a very incomplete list. It contains only those books which are both accessible in English and from which I have received special help for my reading of Plato.

The references to Plato are to the Oxford Classical Text. The translations recommended are Jowett's and that in the Loeb Classical Library. It is hoped that Messrs. Nelson will shortly bring out a selection of passages from Plato, translated by myself.

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